

## INTRODUCTION

The sterility of the final years of Brezhnev's tenure, his heavy-handed foreign policy and the lack of effective leadership immediately following his death have had some significant consequences for the Soviet Union affecting almost all spheres of life. Internally, the Brezhnev legacy was one of declining economic growth rates, obsolete technology, a decaying system of management and political inertia. There was a notable decline in work discipline and morale of a significant part of working force including the officialdom. Mikhail Gorbachev has referred to the state of post-Brezhnev Soviet economy as one in a "pre-crisis" situation.<sup>1</sup>

Internationally, Brezhnev's heavy-handed foreign policy severely disrupted Soviet relations with the non-socialist world. Cold War was revived. The USSR was involved in a new spiral of arms race with the US. Moscow's economic relations with the West have also been severely disrupted. More important, Soviet extraordinary activism in the Third World, particularly, its military involvement in Afghanistan made it virtually isolated in international arena. On the other hand, investments in allies in the Third World became an enormous economic burden to the USSR. The total cost of maintaining Soviet allies rose from between \$4.91 billion and \$7.88 billion in 1971 to between \$38.72 billion and \$47.68 billion in 1981.<sup>2</sup>

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1. *Pravda*, June 26, 1987.

2. These figures are taken from, Charles Wolf J., Keith Crane, K.C. Yeh, Susan Anderson and Edmund Brunne, *The Cost and Benefits of the Soviet Empire, 1981-1983*. (The Rand Corporation, R-3419-NA, August 1986), p. 16.



The significance of such an increase in the cost of maintaining foreign allies is indeed enormous particularly against the backdrop of declining growth rate of Soviet economy for the same period. Over the period 1965-70 average annual rate of growth in Soviet GNP was 5.3%, it declined to 3.8% during the period 1970-75 and to 2.8% during 1976-80.<sup>3</sup>

The state of Soviet economy and polity shattered the confidence of Soviet leadership in the brighter future, so optimistically projected during the Brezhnev years. The prevailing sentiments in the Kremlin has been expressed by Gorbachev as he said "what is at stake today is the ability of the Soviet Union to enter the new millennium in a manner worthy of a great and prosperous power."<sup>4</sup>

However, the evolution of new policies—both domestic and foreign—has been a complex process accompanied by intense debate within the policy making circles, hesitation in policy formulation and zig-zags in the implementation level. While discussing post-Brezhnev Soviet policies, two factors should be taken into consideration. First, two Soviet leaders—Andropov and Chernenko—died in as many years. It is only with the accession of Gorbachev to the post of the General Secretary of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) that the Soviets appear to have a stable leader. Second, Gorbachev's ascendance to power is not merely a matter of change of the top leadership. It involved the replacement of the whole generation of leaders by a relatively young, dynamic and innovative one. In addition, a new party programme was adopted replacing the old one, a number of important plenums of the CC and a new Congress of the CPSU were held under Gorbachev. It was indeed a new government with a new manifesto.

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3. Abram Bergson, "Soviet Economic Slowdown and the 1981-85 Plan", *Problems of Communism*, (May-June, 1981), p. 26.
  4. Quoted in Seweryn Bialer and Joan Afferica, "The Genesis of Gorbachev's World", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 64, No. 3, 1987), p. 1735,



Gorbachev has initiated a series of economic and political reforms widely known as "*perestroika*" and "*glasnost*". They are designed to restructure, revitalize and rejuvenate Soviet economic and political system so as to maintain its super power status. On foreign policy issues as well, Gorbachev came forward with a set of new ideas designed to bring about some fundamental changes in Soviet perspectives on and practical policy towards the outside world.

On numerous occasions, he stressed the need for a "radical breaking of many customary attitudes to foreign policy"<sup>5</sup> and proclaimed the need for "new political thinking" on the problems of international security and cooperation. In operational terms, the changes would indicate a significant degree of moderation of approach towards, and willingness to accommodate with, the interests of its adversaries. Gorbachev's new ideas on foreign policy were expressed by him in a recent article where he wrote, "Objective processes are making our complex and diverse world more and more interrelated, and interdependent. And it increasingly needs a mechanism, capable of discussing common problems in responsible fashion and at a representative level and mutually searching for a balance of differing, contradictory, yet real, interests of the contemporary community of states and nations".<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the USSR under Gorbachev is undergoing a process of reappraisal and modification of its foreign policy doctrines, perhaps a sophistication of its tactics and readjustment of its practical policy in the light of the changed circumstances in international arena. Accordingly, Soviet policy towards the Third World as well has undergone gradual but radical changes in its approaches concerning a wide range of issues and geopolitical regions. Brezhnev legacy with regard to his Third World policy

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5. "The Vladivostok Speech", *Strategic Digest*, September 1987), p. 1735.

6. Mikhail Gorbachev, "Reality and Guarantees for a Secure World", *International Affairs*, (No. 11, 1987), p. 3.



has been questioned even during his life-time. Following his death and with the accession of Andropov to power an unprecedented debate was unleashed on the subject. The debate continued even under Brezhnevite Chernenko. It was under Gorbachev that a new Soviet Third World policy gradually took shape and by now a more or less well-defined Third World policy has been formulated. The policy has been viewed as a shift to the "right" in the traditional communist vocabulary. Whether or not it is indeed so, is a debatable matter and is likely to remain so in the foreseeable future. What is clear by now is that Brezhnev's undue reliance on military force in pursuing foreign policy objectives has been rejected. On the other hand, how the present leadership is going to pursue its objectives by peaceful i.e., economic, diplomatic and other means remains less clear. The strategy of exporting revolution has given way to a policy of strengthening ties with geopolitically and economically important Third World states. On a closer focus, it would be interesting to observe how the Soviet Union would reconcile its present policy with communist ideology particularly in the event of prospective radical revolution in a Third World country.

The Soviet Union's future dealing with its weak and troubled Marxist-Leninist allies like Angola, Afghanistan, and Ethiopia would be among the most complex aspects of its Third World policy. Geneva Accord on Afghanistan for example, has raised some fundamental questions : Is Gorbachev trying to achieve the goal at the negotiation table what Brezhnev could not achieve at the battlefield ? Or is he abandoning the allies to whom Brezhnev made specific commitments to defend ? Or, has Gorbachev got something else in his mind ? Thus, the new Soviet policy towards the Third World has raised no less questions than it answered. It generated widespread and intense discussions among academicians and policy makers, particularly in relation to the rationale, objectives, methods of implementation as well as future implications of this policy. In



this backdrop, an attempt would be made below to study the post-Brezhnev Soviet policy towards the Third world. The study begins with a brief survey of Soviet policy towards the Third World since the emergence of Soviet state with a focus on the major issues which served as a background to the current developments. Part II is designed to explore the reasons behind recent changes in Soviet perspectives on the Third world. Part III will analyse the process of the formulation of Soviet Third World policy during post-Brezhnev period and identify its major directions. Part IV examines the new policy in the light of actual Soviet behaviour in the Third World. Finally, the paper attempts to assess the outcome of present policy and indicate its future directions.

## I

### SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS THE THIRD WORLD: AN OVERVIEW

Soviet relations with the Third World countries has always been an important, albeit controversial issue in its foreign policy. People under colonial yoke, their struggle for national liberation has been a theme in Lenin's writing even long before the October Revolution. In his 1908 article "Inflamable Material in World Politics", Lenin emphasised the enormous potential of colonial people to play the role of active history-makers during the periods to come.<sup>7</sup> Following the October Revolution, Lenin's attention on colonial problem significantly increased.

Two themes have been most prominent in his thinking. First, Lenin believed that the World War I, October Revolution and subsequent developments brought about some fundamental changes

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7. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1963). p. 184.



in the colonial countries as well as in international arena which were conducive to the successful struggle of the colonised people for national liberation. Second, the world—as seen by Lenin—is a place where imperialism and communism are engaged in a deadly struggle against each other which must end with the victory of the latter. Lenin himself encapsulated his ideas as follows: the “revolutionary movement of the peoples of the East can now develop effectively, can reach a successful issue, only with the revolutionary struggle of our Soviet Republic against international imperialism”.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the foundation for Lenin’s “natural ally” theory was laid. This theory—in the present context—means that the socialist countries on the one hand, and Third World nations and the liberation struggles of the colonised peoples on the other, are symbolically linked in one great historical struggle against imperialism.<sup>9</sup> In his theses for the Second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern), Lenin suggested that “a policy must be pursued that will achieve the closest alliance, with Soviet Russia, of the national and colonial liberation movements”<sup>10</sup>

However, the implementation of this strategy proved to be much more difficult than initially foreseen and has been a constant source of contention in Soviet as well as international communist circles. Two questions have been the main focus around which most of the policy debates centred. These are: (i) the choice of right ally between bourgeois nationalist and proletarian streams within the national liberation movements, and (ii) the degree of commitment to the newly-liberated states and national liberation movements to which the Soviet Union should be prepared and

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8. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, (Progress Publishers, Moscow 1965), p. 151.

9. See, A.K.M. Abdus Sabur, “Soviet-Iranian Relations Since the Islamic Revolution”, *BISS Journal*, (Vol. 6, No. 1, 1985), p. 90.

10. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, (Progress Publishers, 1974), p. 146.



beyond which it should not go. To date, these two questions remain the crux of the problem in Soviet Union's dealing with the Third World nations. Hence, their brief analysis would be helpful in explaining contemporary Soviet policy towards the Third World.

### **The Choice of Ally**

The nature of conflict in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the tasks and the stages of national liberation struggle, the role of national bourgeoisie in it and the relations of communists both national and international, with the Third World bourgeoisie during the liberation struggle and after the achievement of national independence have been a subject of debate in Soviet and international communist circles practically since the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917. First major and explicit discussion on the topic took place at the Second Comintern Congress held in 1920. At the Congress, Lenin stated that the colonial and semi-colonial nations would experience a two-stage revolution. The first one would be a national revolution to establish independence and would be led by the national bourgeoisie who would institute bourgeois democracy. The second one would be a socialist revolution led by the proletariat to establish the dictatorship of proletariat. He also believed that before the second stage could occur the first stage bourgeois-democratic revolution must have been completed.<sup>11</sup> Lenin viewed the national bourgeoisie in the colonial countries as dynamic and capable class who can lead the anti-colonial struggle and fulfil the tasks ahead. He wrote that in those countries, there is still a bourgeoisie capable of championing sincere, militant, consistent democracy, a worthy comrade of France's great men of Enlightenment and great leaders of the close of the eighteenth century. The chief representative, or the chief social bulwark, of this Asian bourgeoisie that is still capable

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11. See, Mark N. Katz, *The Third World in Soviet Military Thought* (Croom Helm, London and Canberra) 1982, p. 13.



of supporting a historically progressive cause, is the peasant. And side by side with him there already exist a liberal bourgeoisie.<sup>12</sup> Hence, Lenin stressed the "necessity of all communist parties to render assistance to the bourgeois-democratic movement" in these societies.<sup>13</sup>

At the mentioned Congress, Lenin was strongly challenged on this idea by a young Indian communist Manabendra Nath Roy. Roy argued that the national bourgeoisie in the colonial countries was so weak and so dependent on the colonial powers that it could not lead the first stage of the revolution to establish national independence. The proletariat would have to lead the first stage of revolution as well. Although this revolution would also establish bourgeois-democracy, the proletariat would be in a better position to carry out the second stage of the revolution, thus, allowing socialism to triumph sooner than Lenin expected.<sup>14</sup> Roy also argued that Lenin's general endorsement of national liberation movement led by the national bourgeoisie in the colonial world would serve only to establish capitalism in these areas and would ultimately lead to a betrayal of communists and the revolution. Roy also stated that such groups as the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) and the Indian National Congress were inherently untrustworthy and should not be seen as vehicles to advance the interest of world communism.<sup>15</sup> On the basis of such assumptions, Roy wanted the Comintern to assist exclusively the institution and development of the Communist movement in India.<sup>16</sup> The Second Congress of the Comintern left

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12. Quoted in, Akhmed Iskenderov, "Leninism and the national Liberation Movement", *International Affairs*, (No. 11, 1987), p. 72.

13. Quoted in, Bhabani Sen Gupta, *Communism in Indian Politics*, (Young Asia Publications, New Delhi, 1978), p. 9.

14. Mark N. Katz, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

15. See, Francis Fukuyama, "Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy", *Problems of Communism*, (September-October 1987), pp. 2-3.

16. Bhabani Sen Gupta, *op. cit.* pp. 9-10



the question open. Careful study of the documents of the Congress reveals a compromise between Lenin's and Roy's propositions.<sup>17</sup>

This tactical debate over whether the national bourgeoisie of the proletariat would lead the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist liberation struggle and whether the Soviet Union would support the national bourgeoisie or the communists in the Third World has never been fully resolved. While coming forward with his own thesis, Lenin did not reject Roy's thesis altogether. Indeed, it was with Lenin's support that the Second Congress of the Comintern passed resolutions approving both Lenin's and Roy's contradictory theses.<sup>18</sup> More important, Lenin also developed a theory which envisaged the possibility of transition of economically backward countries to socialism by-passing the capitalist stage of development.<sup>19</sup> As a result, from strictly theoretical point of view, Roy's thesis could not be branded as anti-Leninist and along with Lenin's thesis it remained one of the options of the Soviet Union in its dealings with the Third World. Thus, theoretical confusion persisted and the Soviet leaders could never reach a consensus on which policy was more capable to serve their purpose in the Third World.

Lessons from national liberation movements as well as Soviet Union's relations with the Third World have been confusing too. The national liberation movement proved to be much more diverse, complex and contradictory than could be predicted in 1920. The pace and direction of events in the Third World have been marked by so many contradictions, zig-zags and by-paths that it became virtually impossible for the Soviet Union to explain Third World developments within a single theoretical framework. Contrary to Roy's predictions, Indian National Congress proved to be a broad-based, radical, and dynamic political force and remained consistent

17. Akhmed Iskenderov, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-72.

18. Mark N. Katz, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

19. See, Karen Khachaturov, "The Ideas of the October Revolution and the Collapse of Imperialism's Colonial Policy," *International Affairs*, (No. 12, 1987), p. 24.



with its commitment to the anti-colonial liberation struggle. While the communists had a narrow support-base only in metropolitan centres like, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. During late 1940s, both Moscow and Indian communists believed that Indian bourgeoisie could serve only as "lackeys of imperialism".<sup>20</sup> Instead, Indian National Congress retained its independent and anti-imperialist character. In China, however, the case was just the opposite. Despite Western support to Chiang Kai-shek's KMT and a dubious Soviet policy, Communist Party of China (CPC) under Mao emerged as the most powerful force in Chinese politics and finally came to power. Such diverging developments made it difficult for the Soviets to decide before-hand, which party is likely to emerge as the leading force in the struggle for independence in a particular country and thus, not infrequently deprived them of the opportunity of siding with the potential victor.

The experience of Soviet Union's alliance and friendship with both the socialist and progressive bourgeois-democratic regimes has been mixed. While the USSR has been able to establish a varied degree of influence in most of the Third World socialist countries, its experience with China has been extremely bitter. On the other hand, Soviet friendly relations with bourgeois nationalists brought political influence often at the expense of local communist strength. For instance, the Soviets had to maintain friendly relations with Kemal's Turkey, Nasser's Egypt and Qassem's Iraq even when communists in these countries were being severely persecuted.

Thus, divergence in theoretical perceptions on diverse and often conflicting developments in the Third World countries made it virtually impossible for the Soviet Union to stick to a particular policy constantly. As a result, the Soviet policy on whether to side with Third World nationalists or the communists has frequently been fluctuated, changed and reversed depending on the change in the tasks of Soviet domestic and foreign policy. Indeed, Soviet

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20. Bhabani Sen Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 27.



policy towards the Third World right from 1917 to the present can be seen as an alternation between these two choices. Francis Fukuyama identified ten periods in the evolution of Soviet Third World policy (see Table 1). Fukuyama's periodisation appears very useful in explaining Soviet Third World policy as it has been based on actual policy pursued by the Soviet state, which may not necessarily be linked with change in leadership. However, there is no scope for following Fukuyama's periodisation uncritically. First, what Fukuyama identified as 'left-wing' policy from strictly Leninist point of view often proved to be sectarian, adventurist and not infrequently detrimental to the cause of advancing revolution as well as broader Soviet political influence. Second, what he has identified as "right wing" policy successfully increased Third World acceptability of Soviet political influence. It would perhaps

**Table 1 : Ten Periods of Soviet Third World Policy**

Period	Orientation	Characterization
1. 1917-1921	left	War Communism
2. 1921-1928	right	New Economic Policy (NEP)
3. 1928-1935	left	"Third Period"
4. 1935-1939	right	Popular Front
5. 1939-1941	left	Nazi-Soviet Pact
6. 1941-1947	right	Wartime alliance
7. 1947-1952	left	Zhdanovshchina
8. 1952-1964	right	Khrushchev's opening to "bourgeois nationalists"
8a. 1964-1972	right	Moribund Khrushchevism
9. 1973-1982	left	Support for Marxist-Leninist vanguard parties
10. 1982-	right	Andropov-Gorbachev policy

1. This periodisation is done by Francis Fukuyama in his "Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy", *Problems of Communism*, (September-October, 1987), p. 3.



be less controversial if one uses the word orthodox for what Fukuyama called "left-wing" and pragmatic for what he called "right-wing" policy.

October Revolution and its aftermath in the context of revolutionary upsurge in Europe and Asia tempted the Bolsheviks to embark upon a highly orthodox foreign policy. Soviet Russia's European policy was designed to spread proletarian revolution, while its Asian policy was designed to spread anti-colonial revolution and Marxist ideas in the East.

There was soon imperatives for certain degree of retreat from the orthodoxy. Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP), necessity of economic cooperation with the West and above all, the need for breaking the diplomatic isolation dictated the policy of peaceful co-existence with the West during the early 1920s. During this period, Comintern instructed its affiliated parties to form united front with the major bourgeois nationalist groups of the day, such as the Chinese Kuomintang, the Indian National Congress, the Sarekat Islam in Indonesia, and the Wadfi in Egypt.<sup>21</sup> Initially this policy paid-off. the USSR could establish diplomatic relations with most of the European countries and develop economic cooperation with some of them, Germany and France in particular. The USSR could also foster either correct or even friendly relations with most of its neighbours. First setback to this policy in the Third World came when following the death of Sun Yat-sen Chiang kai-shek broke alliance with the CPC. In 1927, Chiang turned against the communists and destroyed most of their forces.<sup>22</sup>

The sixth Comintern Congress of 1928 initiated another period of orthodox policy towards the Third World which lasted until the mid-1930s. During this period, Comintern advised its affiliated parties to jettison bourgeois nationalist allies in favour of a go-it-alone policy which ultimately determined the policy of the

21. Francis Fukuyama, "Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy", *Problems of Communism*, (September-October 1987), p. 4.

22. See, Mark N. Katz, *op. cit.*, p. 14.



communist parties of China, Indo-china, Brazil and India. Most devastating outcome of this policy—though it was not openly confessed until the death of Stalin—is that German Communists failed to cooperate and form a united front with the Social Democrats to challenge the advance of Hitler to power.

Grave threat posed by Fascist Germany to the USSR, US recognition to the Soviet Union and a comparatively flexible approach of the West European powers toward the Soviet Union brought about a substantial degree of moderation in Stalin's foreign policy during the mid-1930s. His main objective was to form collective security system with the Western democracies that would be explicitly directed against Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis. Revolution in the Third World was put to the back seat as Stalin was unwilling to antagonise the colonial powers, Britain and France in particular. However, frustration of its experience with Britain and France led Moscow to sign a Non-aggression Pact with Fascist Germany in 1939 which lasted until June 1941 when Germany invaded the Soviet Union. During this period, the Comintern instructed local communist parties in colonies apart from China to follow a strategy hostile to both the colonial powers and the nationalist forces with a view to impeding the war efforts of their colonial masters.<sup>23</sup> Characterization of this policy as orthodox or "left-wing" may seem odd as this policy may have been designed to appease Fascist Germany rather than to promote revolution in the colonies.

Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Soviet policy suffered a U-turn. Alliance with Western democracies against common enemy, fascist Germany, became vital to the USSR for its very survival. Therefore, all other objectives were subservient to the establishment and the maintenance of alliance relationship with the Western democracies. To demonstrate his

23. Francis Fukuyama, "Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy", *Problems of Communism*, (September-October 1987), p. 4.



good intention to the West, Stalin even went to the extent of dissolving the Comintern in 1943. Communists under British and French colonial rule were instructed to promote the cause of Allied victory over Fascism. Thus, the Indian communists, who despite Gandhi's unwillingness to fight the British Raj wanted to transform Gandhian movement into a general insurrection during 1939-1941, failed to respond when Gandhi gave his battle cry in 1942 with the Quit India slogan.

However, with the end of World War II, this policy lost its rationale. Alliance relationship with the West was no more so important. Moreover, as seen from Moscow, Soviet wartime gains achieved at the battle field and agreed upon by its Allies at Yalta were being questioned and even challenged by the post-war Western leadership, Truman Administration in particular. By 1947, the USSR again embarked upon an orthodox, rigid and to a significant extent adventurist policy towards the Third World. Influenced by the Soviet Union, Third World communists once again broke with their bourgeois nationalist allies in favour of a go-it-alone insurrectionist policy. Without necessary organizational strength, communist parties in a number of countries, notably, in India,<sup>24</sup> Malaya, Burma and Indonesia<sup>25</sup> launched bids for power and failed (the Chinese were an exception). By and large, this policy proved to be adventurist. It isolated the Soviet Union from the main currents of international life and have had devastating effects on the development of a number of communist parties in the Third World. After Stalin realized his mistakes, he did not live long enough to initiate another change in Soviet policy towards the Third World.

Under Khrushchev, the Third World grew significantly in importance in Soviet foreign policy. Stalin's assessment about ruling

24. For details, see, Bhabani Sen Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-29.

25. For details on Malaya, Burma and Indonesia, see, Laszek Buszynski, *Soviet Foreign Policy and Southeast Asia*, (Crom Helm, London and Sydney, 1986), pp. 11-12.



Third World bourgeois nationalist regimes proved to be wrong. During the Korean War, India played an independent role. Nationalist leaders prepared to challenge the West and to seek Soviet friendship rose in a number of countries like, Egypt Iran, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Indonesia and others. Most spectacular was the rise of Fidel Castro in Cuba and his transformation to Marxism-Leninism. Armed insurgency occurred also in Indochina, Algeria and a number of other countries. As a matter of fact, a large number of countries were involved in political, economic and—not infrequently military—conflicts with the West. All these offered the Soviet Union an unprecedented opportunity to find allies in the Third World on anti-Western basis. Soviet policy towards the Third World entered a new era. The Third Programme of the CPSU adopted at its 22nd Congress stated that “The CPSU considers fraternal alliance with the peoples who have thrown off the colonial or semi-colonial yoke to be a cornerstone of its international policy. This alliance is based on the common vital interests of world socialism and the world national liberation movement. The CPSU regards it as its internationalist duty to assist the people who have set out to win and strengthen their national independence, all peoples who are fighting for the complete abolition of the colonial system”.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Lenin’s “natural ally” theory was revived with new contents added to it in a politically more relevant form and in a much wider context.

This policy let the Soviet Union to establish and develop politico-diplomatic, economic and to a lesser extent security cooperation with the mainstream Third World countries and thus, dramatically expand its influence and enhance its prestige. Indeed, it is under Khrushchev that the Soviet Union posed a real challenge to the West in an area extending from Cuba to Indonesia. However, this gains were balanced by a number of failures. The primacy of politics and

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26. Quoted in, A.A. Gromyko and B.N. Ponomarev eds., *Soviet Foreign Policy*, Vol. II, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1981), p. 262.



ideology over economics coupled with over-simplified and over-optimistic approach led to serious errors in judgement. Some Third World countries proved to be no less resistant to pressure from the USSR than from the West. Some commitments, particularly that to Egypt proved to be highly expensive. Finally, Cuban crisis painfully revealed the weakness of the Soviet Union vis-a-vis the West.

Brezhnev's initial period has been characterised as one of highly rationalistic, realistic and pragmatic approach. Economic rationalism took precedence over politics and ideological orthodoxy. Brezhnev however retained Khrushchev's conceptual formulations, but changed their function to suit his pragmatic policy. At the same time, during this period the USSR cautiously consolidated its gains in the Third World achieved during Khrushchev period,<sup>27</sup> begun rapid build-up of its nuclear forces to match that of the US and thus, prepared the ground for an unprecedented offensive in the Third World which Brezhnev launched in the mid-1970s. A detailed analysis of Soviet policy towards the Third World during late-Brezhnev and post-Brezhnev periods would be done elsewhere in this paper.

Characterisation of Soviet policy towards the Third World as orthodox and pragmatic—or as Fukuyama puts it “left-wing” and right-wing”—depending on whether the Soviet Union decides to side with the Third World communists or bourgeois nationalists appears by and large justified. In this regard, however, some points should be taken into consideration : first, this characterisation should not be interpreted in a simplistic way. It is rather designed to identify the main thrust of Soviet Third World policy in a particular period. Some unorthodox and pragmatic policies toward a particular country or region may be pursued during an orthodox period and *vice-versa*. Second, in one sense, all Soviet policy since Stalin has been unorthodox and pragmatic, because it has carefully

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27. There were some set-backs as well : in Indonesia in 1965, Ghana in 1966, Mali in 1968,



abandoned Stalinist orthodoxy and its emphasis was focused primarily on non-communist anti-imperialist forces in the Third World. Nonetheless, by mid-1970s Brezhnev's policy had moved leftward relatively to the Khrushchev period. Third, In course of time, heterogeneity of the forces involved in national liberation movement was being gradually exposed. While most of the Third World regimes preferred neutrality and non-alignment, some tilted either to the West or to the East. Emotional rejection of capitalism by a number of Third World regimes and their adherence to various kinds of national socialism or even Marxism-Leninism offered an opportunity and posed a challenge to the Soviet policy makers. Post-Stalin leaders demonstrated a significant degree of creativity in their approach towards the Third World. Persistent efforts were made to bridge the gap between orthodox and pragmatic policies, synthesise them, albeit with mixed success.

### The Degree of Commitment

From its very inception, the Soviet state has made persistent efforts to emerge as the champion of freedom and independence of people under colonial yoke. In Lenin's writings and official documents, the right of the people to freedom and self-determination up to secession and the formation of independent state was recognized.<sup>28</sup> Indeed some oppressed nations within the Russian Empire could acquire the right to self-determination immediately after the October Revolution.<sup>29</sup> Severe condemnation of colonial plunder, support to the colonised people and even promise to "bring liberation to the oppressed peoples of the world" frequently appeared in Soviet official pronouncements.<sup>30</sup> These pronouncements have been declaratory in nature and did not define the degree of

28. A.A. Gromyko and B.N. Ponomarev, eds., *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 520.

29. They are: Poland, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. However, during the World War II, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were again incorporated to the USSR.

30. See A.A. Gromyko, B.N. Ponomarev. eds. *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 39-41.



commitment to which the Soviets should be prepared for the liberation of other peoples and beyond which it should not go.

However, within a couple of months following the Revolution, this question came to be seriously discussed by the Soviet communists as a part of the most crucial issue of the time: whether to sign a humiliating peace treaty with Germany (Brest Peace Treaty) or to wage a revolutionary war against it. During the debate over Brest Peace Treaty, Bolshevik Party was split between "Left Communists" led by Bukharin on the one side and Lenin and Stalin on the other, while Trotsky's somewhat different stand was very close to that of Bukharin. In course of their debate, "national interest" of the state versus "international duty" of the Revolution dichotomy became one of the focal points. Lenin pointed out that the position of the socialist revolution in Russia must form the basis of any definition of the international tasks of our Soviet power,<sup>31</sup> thus, assuming a highly pragmatic stance, despite revolutionary euphoria prevailing in the country. Lenin's emphasis on the primacy of domestic tasks and the interests of the Revolution over its international tasks has been severely challenged by the "Left—Communists" and Trotskyites who championed the theory of 'revolutionary war' that would spread socialist revolution to other countries. They considered it expedient to accept the possibility of losing Soviet power in the interest of world revolution.<sup>32</sup> Lenin regarded this position as "strange and monstrous".<sup>33</sup> According to him, the Soviet power should help world revolution, but, it should choose a form of help which is commensurate with its own strength.<sup>34</sup> Finally Lenin prevailed over Bukharin and Trotsky and this position has never been challenged by any of his successors. National and

31. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965), p. 444.

32. See, A.A. Gromyko, B.N. Ponomarev, eds, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 58.

33. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965), p. 69.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.



ideological interests and its strength remain to-date the deciding factor in determining the degree of Soviet commitment to its allies, including Third World states and national liberation movements. Subsequent debates over whether and to what extent to commit to an ally turned to be debate over Soviet Union's ability to commit and costs and benefits thereof.

For the convenience of our analysis, it would be desirable to define some measure of Soviet commitment to its Third World allies which would be helpful in determining the degree of that commitment. There are three such indices : (i) political commitment, such as official pronouncements, diplomatic support and formal treaties; (ii) quantity and quality of military and economic assistance; (iii) preparedness to take risks when faced with opportunities or threats. These three indices will be used in our attempt to determine the degree of Soviet commitment to its Third World allies over the period since the October Revolution.

During the initial period following the Revolution, Soviet commitment to colonial and semi-colonial countries was restricted exclusively to political support, except some countries bordering with the Soviet Union. Its military involvement in Iran, a friendship treaty and economic and military assistance to Afghanistan and stationing of troops in Mongolia have been more related to immediate security of the Soviet state rather than commitment to allies. During this period, Soviet Russia has undertaken certain degree of real commitment with regard to two nationalist allies. First one is Turkey under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk which was fighting the Greek army backed by Britain. In March 1921, the Soviet government signed a friendship treaty with Turkey. During 1921-1922, Soviet Russia provided Turkey with 11.1 million gold rubles in aid,<sup>35</sup> and enough military supplies to equip perhaps three divi-

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35. A.A. Gromyko and B.N. Ponomarev, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1. p. 150.



sions.<sup>36</sup> In this case, the amount of economic and military assistance suggests a substantial degree of commitment, when it is weighed in the backdrop of a civil war and severe economic difficulties suffered by Soviet Russia. However, it hardly attracted additional hostility on the part of Britain towards Soviet Russia. Therefore, the risk was minimal, if any. The Soviets were also cautious enough not to send troops or armed "volunteers".

Second instance of Soviet Commitment to a nationalist ally was that to Kuomintang of Sun Yat-sen in its struggle to unite China under its leadership. Political support and the amount of military assistance rendered to Chinese nationalists suggest a higher degree of commitment to China in comparison with that to Turkey. CPC was instructed by Comintern to form a united front with the Kuomintang making it the first test case of united front with the bourgeois nationalists in anti-imperialist struggle. Both the USSR and the Comintern were heavily involved in Chinese civil war with over 1000 of advisers. Apart from military assistance, some Soviet advisers even participated in actual combat.<sup>37</sup> In this case, limited degree of risk was involved, which has been demonstrated by Japanese expansion in China and hostility towards the USSR during the 1930s. However, main blow to this venture came from the Chinese nationalists, when in 1927, Chiang Kai-shek turned against the Communists and brutally massacred them.

As a result of troubled Soviet relations with Turkey and disastrous experience in China the national bourgeoisie fell out of Stalin's favour. His awareness of Soviet economic and military weakness in non-contiguous areas also refrained him from undertaking any commitment. Efforts to foment revolution abroad virtually ceased during the 1930s, instead, the USSR concentrated its efforts on the building of "socialism in one country". In addition, during early 1930s, faced with the prospects of hostility on

36. Bruce D. Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts*, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1984), p. 9.

37. See, *Ibid.*, p. 10.



two fronts--from Japan in the East and from Germany in the West, Stalin considered the improvement of Soviet relations with Western countries the principal task of Soviet diplomacy.

Stalin's conservativeness in undertaking commitments, taking risk in particular, for an ally in the Third World remained intact even during the Cold War period. During post War period, when communist parties of India, Burma, Philippines, Malaya, Indonesia—mainly influenced by Stalin's attitude towards Third World national bourgeoisie—launched bids for power, Stalin did very little to support them.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, in two instances, Stalin was compelled to certain degree of commitment. Stalin's repeated attempts to convince the CPC that prospects for its victory are bleak and it should join a coalition government with the KMT was of no avail as Mao Tse-tung reached the conclusion that his victory is inevitable.<sup>39</sup> The course of war between the Communists and the nationalists proved Mao to be correct. Indeed, in China the Soviet Union was left with no option, but eventually to back the communists in their bid for power. While the USSR came forward with military aid to the communists, its commitment to Chinese Revolution was cautious, by and large clandestine and to a certain extent hesitant. It has been the result of Soviet concern about the still unpredictable outcome of both the Chinese Revolution and indirect Soviet encounter with the United States which was backing the KMT.

The Soviet Union had to take even a much greater risk during the Korean War. While caution and flexibility of response enabled the USSR to avoid a direct encounter with the United States, the Korean War and subsequent developments made a Soviet-US rapprochement inconceivable for a considerable period of time.

38. See, Mark. N. Katz, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16; and Laszek Buszynski, *op. cit.* pp. 11-12.

39. See, Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence : Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-73*, 2nd edn. (Praeger Publishers, New York, 1974) pp. 486-89; and Bruce D. Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 15.



Khrushchev came forward with a new outlook and approach towards the Third World. He realized the opportunities offered to the USSR by the process of decolonisation. He also changed the Soviet self-image with regard to its ability to render economic and military assistance to its allies. Development of Soviet nuclear forces, particularly, its advent to sputnic era before the US, gave the USSR a sense of (if erroneous) equality with the US.

During Khrushchev, the USSR undertook unprecedented commitment with regard to economic and military assistance and also certain degree of risk in order to develop relations with Afro-Asian countries. Soviet economic assistance committed to Third World states during 1955-64 averaged \$ 425 million annually and its military assistance during the same period averaged \$ 375 million per year. Soviet trade with non-socialist developing countries also witnessed a spectacular growth during the decade from 1955 to 1965 : from 304 million roubles (5.2 percent of total trade turnover) to 1, 743.6 million roubles (11.9 percent of total trade turnover).<sup>40</sup> Initially, objectives of this policy was modest : expansion of politico-economic and to a lesser extent security relations with a view to preventing the growth of Western influence, particularly, US-sponsored alliance system and to win the support of non-aligned nations. The USSR undertook a number of costly ventures in the Third World, like Bhilai Steel Plant in India and Aswan Dam in Egypt. In terms of taking risk, it was however relatively cautious. Nonetheless, Khrushchev's policy was threatening in style and was characterised by flamboyance and on occasions high-stake gamble in terms of taking risk for an ally. Indeed, Khrushchev had a notorious reputation for a number of his attempts to draw political and/or security gains by implying in advance a greater degree of commitment than he in fact would or

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40. Roger E. Kanet, "Soviet Military Assistance to the Third World" in John F. Copper and Daniel S. Papp eds., *Communist Nation's Military Assistance*, (Westview Press, Boulder, 1983), p. 41.



could subsequently deliver to his ally. Thus, while Khrushchev's policy yielded enormous political gains and prestige for the Soviet Union during the Suez Crisis of 1956, it also yielded the greatest overseas humiliation for Moscow during the Cuban Crisis of 1962 which eventually contributed to Khrushchev's ouster.

During initial period of L.I. Brezhnev (1964-early 1970s), Soviet policy towards the Third World has been extremely cautious in terms of taking real risk in favour of allies. On the other hand, Soviet involvement in the Third World grew in a much faster pace and in a larger scale than during Khrushchev period. Deliveries of Soviet military equipments increased substantially. During 1968-1971, the amount increased to \$ 700 million annually and then it showed a dramatic increase reaching more than \$ 6,600 million per year by 1979.<sup>41</sup> Deliveries of Soviet economic assistance to developing countries still remained modest and averaged about \$ 515 million annually since 1972.<sup>42</sup> However, there have been cautious attempts to build more durable economic relations with the developing countries, what Kosygin called an international division of labour that would be mutually beneficial to both sides.

Two contradictory trends can be observed in Soviet policy towards the Third World during the initial period of Brezhnev's tenure. On the one hand, the experience of Cuban crisis, relative economic and military weakness vis-a-vis the US and the latter's preparedness to take risks to defend its overseas positions made the USSR cautious in terms of taking risk for its allies. One major concern has been to avoid confrontation with the US. Thus, even when Arab-Israeli War of October 1973 demanded a greater degree of commitment on the part of the USSR, it acted with caution. On the other hand, in pursuit of low-risk targets in different parts of the globe the USSR extended its political, ideological, economic

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41. *Ibid.*, p. 44

42. *Ibid.*, p. 43



and military involvement to an extent much greater than originally envisaged.

## II

### BREZHNEV LEGACY : REASONS FOR CHANGE IN SOVIET PERSPECTIVES ON THE THIRD WORLD.

As discussed earlier, Brezhnev initially continued with Khrushchev's policy of supporting bourgeois nationalist movements and regimes in the Third World, albeit with certain degree of caution. However, since early 1970s, his policy gradually took a more hardline approach compared to his predecessor. By mid-1970s, the centre of gravity of support shifted away from bourgeois nationalist regimes to self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist regimes and movements and Brezhnev ventured commitments that involved greater degree of risks.

A number of reasons may be attributed to this shift. First, as judged by the Soviet leaders, economy of the USSR and its CMEA allies made tremendous progress during the 1970s. The national income of CMEA countries increased by 62 percent over the 1971-1979 period, while the volume of industrial production grew by 79 percent. These figures are double those of the developed capitalist countries.<sup>43</sup> Second, during this period the Soviet Union achieved its long cherished strategic parity with the US which as viewed by Soviet leaders "served to alter the balance of forces on the international scene and strengthen the position and role of the socialist community".<sup>44</sup> Third, alliance with a number of bourgeois nationalist leaders had been disappointing because, from the Soviet perspectives, they appeared to be unreliable. On the other hand, Third World Marxist-Leninist regimes—quite a

43. A.A. Gromyko and B.N. Ponomarev, eds., *op. cit.*, Vol. 11, p. 520.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 592



number of which emerged during this period—proved to be more cooperative and loyal. During late 1960s and early 1970s the Third World witnessed a number of nationalist and democratic movements which were gradually assuming the radical nature. These developments were assessed by the 24th Congress of the CPSU as the beginning of the transformation of the struggle for national liberation in many countries into a struggle against feudalism and capitalism.<sup>45</sup>

Fourth, the East-West *detente* has given the Soviet Union stability in the most crucial aspect of its external relations which helped Moscow divert attention and energy to the targets in the Third World. Moreover Brezhnev perhaps seriously believed that there was no contradiction between the pursuit of *detente* and supporting anti-Western revolutionary changes in the Third World.

Finally, the United States was entangled in the so-called "Vietnam Syndrome". The US public opinion was vehemently against Washington's involvement and risk of war in the Third World. As a result, the US not only refrained from undertaking any further Vietnam-like venture in the Third World, it also retreated from a number of its previous positions.

All these factors *en bloc* provided added impetus for power in Brezhnev's policy towards the Third World during the second half of the 1970s. Soviet policy during this period was characterised by extraordinary activism and unprecedented offensiveness.

It began with the joint Soviet-Cuban intervention in Angolan civil war in 1975 the success of which encouraged joint Soviet-Cuban involvement in Ethiopia in 1977-78. This policy continued through Soviet support for Vietnam's intervention in Kampuchea in 1978 and culminated in the Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan in December 1979. Initially, there has been a consensus within the Soviet leadership that this policy is an effective instrument of promoting ideological goals and national interests of the

45. See, *Ibid.*, p. 492



USSR. Soviet military involvement in distant places has also been viewed as the demonstration of the enhanced capability of the Soviet State to pursue more active policy in international arena while the US—suffering from Vietnam Syndrome—was retreating from a number of its previous positions.

In practice however, this policy has had grave consequences effective not only Soviet relations with and Moscow's overall position in the Third World, but also jeopardizing its relations with the West. Most importantly, it had greatly impeded the process of development of Soviet economy and polity. Evidences suggest that Soviet gains in the Third World during Brezhnev period were too expensive. A brief analysis of the costs incurred by the Soviet Union to sustain its extraordinary activism in the Third World would be worthwhile here.

### **Economic Costs**

One recent study ( see Table 2 ) shows that the total costs of maintaining Soviet allies rose from between \$ 4.91 billion and \$ 7.88 billion in 1971 to between \$13.40 billion and \$ 17.65 billion in 1976. In terms of GNP, the costs increased from between 0.86 percent and 1.37 percent to between 1.37 percent and 1.81 percent over the same period. Since mid-1970s, as the USSR was getting more and more entangled in the Third World, both militarily and economically, the costs also were increasing at an alarming rate and in 1981 reached the peak of between \$ 38.72 billion and \$ 47.68 billion in absolute terms and between 2.43 percent and 2.99 percent of GNP. Compared with the costs incurred by the US for similar involvements the Soviet ventures have been much costlier particularly under the criterion of GNP rates. Despite the fact that the US sphere of influence was much wider and much more rewarding, the costs of maintaining its allies over the period 1981-1983 was 0.3 percent of its GNP.<sup>46</sup>

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46. See, Charles Wolf, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.



Table 2\*

**Soviet Costs of Maintaining Its Allies Compared With Its GNP 1971-1983 ( Selective years )**  
**(In billions of current dollars)**

Item	1971	1976	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Total Costs	4.91-7.88	13.40-17.69	25.91-33.33	35.67-45.38	38.72-47.68	31.02-40.37	24.33-33.97
Soviet GNP	573	978	1278	1418	1494	1727	1834
Costs as ratio to GNP (%)	0.86-1.37	1.37-1.81	2.03-2.61	2.52-3.20	2.43-2.99	1.80-2.34	1.33-1.85

\*This Table is adapted from, Charles Wolf, Jr., Keith Crane, K.C. Yeh, Susan Anderson, Edmund Brunner, *The Costs and Benefits of the Soviet Empire, 1981-1983*, ( The Rand Corporation, R-3419-NA, Santa Monica, August 1986) p. 16.



The significance of sharp increase in Soviet costs of maintaining its allies should be viewed in the context of declining growth of Soviet economy over the same period (See Table 3 ). Rate of growth in Net Material Product (NMP) declined from 7.7 percent during 1965-1970 to 5.7 percent during 1970-1975 and further declined to 4.5 percent during 1976-1980. Decline in the rate of growth in industrial output was even more rapid : from 8.5 percent during 1965-1970 to 4.5 percent during 1976-1980. Similar indicators of agricultural output showed even a poorer performance of the sector.

Table 3\*

**Selected Indicators of Soviet Economy (Average annual rate of growth, in percent)**

Item	1965-1970	1970-1975	1976-1980
Net material product <sup>a</sup>	7.7	5.7	4.5 <sup>b</sup>
Industrial output <sup>a</sup>	8.5	7.4	4.5
Agricultural output <sup>a</sup>	3.9	2.5	1.7

\* This table is adapted from, Abram Bergson, "Soviet Economic Slowdown and the 1981-85 Plan" *Problems of Communism*, (May-June 1981 ), p. 26

a. Soviet official data.

b. For 1975-79.

More alarming is the fact that the productivity and technology gap between the East and the West, particularly, that between the Soviet Union and the United States was growing. The problem for the Soviets became not to catch up with the West but to keep from falling further behind. The relatively poor state of Soviet technological and economic performance is well recognised and this has caused a significant decline in the attractiveness of the Soviet Union as an ally particularly in the eyes of the Third World nations.



The appeal of the Soviet economic system has been greatly undermined. Anti-colonial struggle for national liberation was primarily a political and—not seldom—military endeavour. It made Moscow an attractive ally of the national liberation movements. However, after the achievement of political independence, primary and most difficult task faced by the Third World countries is economic reconstruction and development. Most of these countries needed huge amount of economic and technological assistance. Moscow's capacity to offer such assistance to the Third World was never great. Soviet incapability to offer adequate economic assistance severely decreased its attractiveness as an ally. Some of its allies were soon compelled to approach the West for economic assistance. Mozambique was a case in point.

The lesson was obvious. It must develop its economy and technology to compete with the West in attracting Third World countries. The task ahead has been clearly realized by Gorbachev as evidenced by the selection of his priorities. Domestic politics took precedence over foreign policy and economics over politics. Shortly after assuming office, Gorbachev stated that his objective was to ensure that the Soviet Union attained the highest world levels of production.<sup>47</sup> While Brezhnev's objective was to become a political and military equal to the US, Gorbachev's main objective is to become an economic and technological equal. His "perestroika" and "glasnost" are to a great extent designed to achieve this objective. Under conditions of increased economic stringency, an imperative following the new economic outlook in the Soviet Union, Moscow has to decrease the drain of its resources to Third World ventures which no more seems to be cost-effective. And this is one of the main reason which led the post-Brezhnev leadership to offer a fresh approach to the Third World.

#### **Developments Within the Third World :**

The second factor that may have motivated a Soviet re-assessment is Moscow's inability to control the pace and direction of

47. *Pravda*, March 12, 1985.



political developments in the Third World. Soviet frustration with progressive bourgeois nationalist regimes like Egypt under Nasser and Sadat, Indonesia under Sukarno and Algeria led to a major change in its strategy towards the Third World. During the 1970s the USSR began to actively support states governed by self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist vanguard parties (MLVPS) or to encourage the formation and promotion of such parties. This policy brought Moscow a host of socialist oriented allies like, Angola, Mozambique Ethiopia, Kampuchea and Afghanistan. Although these regimes by and large were loyal to Moscow and extensively cooperated with the Soviet bloc, the Soviet experience with them became no less frustrating than its experience with the bourgeois nationalist regimes. Most of them continued to be economically backward even by Third World standards. Most of the states did not prosper in the decade following the leftist take-over. Some of these states even continued to owe their survival directly to Soviet assistance. Developmental problems of a number of these states were compounded by overzealous efforts to transform their economies along strictly socialist lines.

Political difficulties faced by them were even more serious. Most of them tended to be narrowly based in terms of practical power and were thus vulnerable to strong indigenous opposition movements. Their leaders lacked the broad nationalist legitimacy enjoyed by the previous generation of nationalist leaders like Nehru, Sukarno and Nasser. A number of Marxist-Leninist regimes came under the attack of Western supported insurgency forcing Cuba, Vietnam and the Soviet Union itself to deploy large number of combat troops in counter-insurgency wars. Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan proved to be devastating in many respects. Apart from its economic costs, full account of which is yet to be revealed, the Soviet Union had to deploy around 100,000 combat troops in Afghanistan. It has only recently been acknowledged by the Soviet Union that 13,310 Soviet troops were killed, 311 were missing and 35,478 were



wounded in Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup> Eight years of war in Afghanistan have cost Moscow \$ 20 billion.<sup>49</sup>

The diplomatic costs of these ventures have been even greater. Apart from reviving the spirit of Cold War, Afghan crisis virtually isolated the USSR in international arena, in the Islamic world in particular. Since the late 1950s when the United States lost its automatic two-thirds majority in the UN, there has not been a single instance when UN verdicts have been so overwhelmingly against the USSR as in the case of voting on Afghan issue.<sup>50</sup> Brezhnev's offensive policy was designed to strengthen Soviet position in the Third World vis-a-vis the West. Ironically enough, by the end of his tenure, public opinion in the Third World was directed against Moscow no less strongly than against the West.

### Revival of Cold War

The third factor effecting Soviet thinking on the Third World is the changed international climate, more precisely, the drastic deterioration in East-West relations. As already indicated, Brezhnev's offensive strategy towards the Third World was formulated and conducted under conditions of East-West *detente* in the 1970s. By the end of the decade *detente* was in trouble because of Western displeasure over the Soviet activities in the Third World. Afghan crisis and renewed American determination to face the Soviet challenge in the Third World finally revived the spirit of Cold War which affected the Soviet Union in four main ways. First, the Reagan Doctrine which promised and in practice provided political financial and military support to right-wing movements fighting Marxist-Leninist regimes all over the Third World endangered the very survival of a number of Soviet allies. More important, it

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48. See, *The Bangladesh Observer*, May 26, 1988.

49. *Asiaweek*, (April 29, 1988), p. 16.

50. See, A.K.M. Abdus Sabur, "The Afghan Crisis: Prospects for a Negotiated Settlement," *BHSS Journal*, (Vol. 5, No. 1, 1980), p. 51.



worked as a serious disincentive for the Soviet Union to refrain from undertaking any more Afghan-type venture.

Second, the USSR was facing another spiral of arms race with the US, particularly in qualitative terms. Increased demand for resources towards this end competed with requests from allies for increased economic assistance. Since the Soviet military establishment was concerned with matching the military build-up of the economically stronger and technologically superior United States, the choice became a critical one.

Third, the revival of Cold War severely curtailed East-West, particularly, Soviet-US economic relations. Immediately following the Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan, the Carter Administration suspended all export of high technology and machinery to the Soviet Union and also suspended all export licences.<sup>51</sup> These measures particularly hurt the USSR as many of its economic targets for the eighties were planned on the basis of technology to be imported from the US. Soviet economic relations with a number of other Western countries also suffered similar setbacks.

Fourth, as already indicated, during the period of East-West *detente* the Soviets could have more time and energy to devote to activities in the Third World, but Cold War compelled them to focus their attention primarily on the US-Soviet plateau. Moreover, in view of renewed US determination under Reagan Administration to face Soviet challenge in the Third World, further recklessness would involve much higher price and could lead the USSR to a direct military confrontation with the US. The Soviets have obvious compulsions to avoid such an eventuality.

Thus, three factors, viz., economic constraints, inability to control the pace and direction of Third World developments and the revival of Cold War compelled Moscow to reconsider its offensive strategy towards the Third World and offer a fresh approach.

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51. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXVI, 1980), p. 30235.



## III

**Formulation of Post-Brezhnev Soviet Policy Towards the Third World**

The formulation of Post-Brezhnev Soviet policy towards the Third World has been a complex process involving critical reassessment of previous doctrines and practical policy, careful and realistic assessment of the prevailing international situation as well as domestic compulsions. A major study on Soviet academic writings during the later part of Brezhnev period by Elizabeth Valkenier concluded that "some circles in the USSR are coming to grips with the demonstrable fact that there are limits to Soviet power in the Third World, as well as to the advantages to be derived from close identification with the post-colonial grievances. Some even hold that support to Third World causes is disruptive to Soviet-American relations and threaten world peace".<sup>52</sup> Incidentally, she is one of the very few scholars to reach such a conclusion at a time when the prevailing trend was to view the Soviet moves as 'grand design to spread communism'.

Shortly after Brezhnev's death, candid criticism and reevaluation of his Third World policy indeed became the most remarkable trend in academic writings as well as in official pronouncements on the subject. In this regard, Andropov played an important role in initiating the reassessment of and new approach to Soviet policy towards the Third World. First, in his December 21, 1982 speech to the Supreme Soviet, he dealt with the problems and difficulties experienced by young liberated states and described them as "growing pains." Then instead of making commitment of assistance as it was customary during Brezhnev period, he merely wished them "great success in consolidating their independence, and in their fight for prosperity and progress"<sup>53</sup> thus, indicating a

52. Elizabeth Kridl Volkenier, *The Soviet Union and the Third World: An Economic Bind*, (Praeger Publishers, New York, 1983), p. 150.

53. Francis Fukuyama, *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World*, (The Rand Corporation, R-3337-USDP, Santa Monica, February 1986), p. 18



less preparedness to undertake commitment. Second, in an article published in *the Kommunist*, February 1983, Andropov regarded the ideas of Marx as not a dogma but a guide to action that must be imaginatively applied. In this article, he made a strong case for academic flexibility and gave considerable latitude to Soviet scholars in their analysis of—among others—the Third World.<sup>54</sup> Finally, in his speech to the Central Committee Plenum on June 15, 1983, Andropov initiated the critical reassessment of the developments within the socialist oriented countries and made it clear to them that they would have to depend mainly on their own resources for socio-economic development, and thus, indicated a major shift in Soviet approach towards one of the most controversial legacy of Brezhnev in the Third World, viz., over-optimism about and overcommitment to the socialist oriented countries.<sup>55</sup> The process initiated by Andropov continued during the short tenure of Chernenko and culminated in the formulation of a new and more or less well-defined policy under Gorbachev. In this process, a wide range of issues came under careful scrutiny. Our attention will be focused mainly on those issues where the new Soviet leadership is bringing about a change.

### Overall Approach Towards the Third World

In recent Soviet official pronouncements and academic writings complexities, diversities and contradictions of Third World societies are gaining more and more prominence. One may argue, however, that Marxism-Leninism has always viewed the world as full of complexities, diversities and contradictions. Then what this renewed emphasis does mean? Perhaps it is intended to demonstrate the realization on the part of Soviet leadership and academia of the fact that traditional Marxist-Leninist doctrines

54. See, Joseph G. Whelan and Michael J. Dixon, *The Soviet Union in the Third World : Threat to World Peace?* (Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publisher, New York, 1986), pp. 35-36.

55. This point will be elaborated later.



proved to be inadequate in explaining the complexities, diversities and contradictions of contemporary Third World. Many previous Soviet assessments, theoretical propositions, conclusions and predictions have been questioned or even proved to be incorrect. These shortcomings are now being confessed both by Soviet leadership and academia.

Soviet academicians now realise that the social progress of the majority of the newly liberated countries has been less rapid and successful than expected. The difficulties, complications and road-blocks that have been encountered turned out to be much more numerous and serious.<sup>56</sup> Previous forecasts made by a number of scholars and leaders about the automacity of the Third World countries' opting for socialist orientation is currently being debated by the Soviet social scientists.<sup>57</sup>

Self-criticism reached a point, where one Soviet scholar could assert that "at a time of reform when Soviet society is critically reviewing its record in all spheres of life, the only thing that the USSR can reproach itself for in its relations with the Third World is a degree of political naivety and a certain shallowness of scientific analysis".<sup>58</sup>

Not only the previous analysis of complexities, diversities and contradictions in the process of development of Third World societies but also the fundamental concepts of national liberation movements and revolutions are now being challenged. A recent study concludes that a common shortcoming of previous interpretations is that "they fail to answer the principal question : What kind of society are we dealing with from the social and economic point of view and how far are changes in the social character of this society influenced by the national liberation movement?"<sup>59</sup> Such

56. See, Akhmed Iskenderov, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

57. Anatoli Gromyko. "The Revolution that Awakened Africa," *International Affairs*, (No. 12, 1987), p. 32.

58. Karen Khachaturov, *op. cit.*, p. 29

59. Akhmed Iskenderov, *op. cit.*, p. 69



realization of previous failures, however, cannot be considered as total pessimism among Soviet political and academic circles regarding either the future role of Third World countries in world politics and economy or Soviet ability to develop relations with them. Prevailing sentiment in Moscow can be considered as a certain degree of scepticism and a much higher degree of realism.

The inevitable lesson from past Soviet policies is that the Third World is so complex and diverse a region that it would continue to be difficult for either of the super powers to extend uninterrupted influence. There are forces in the Third World—diverse, contradictory, but united—to oppose attempts by the super powers to control it. While such an assessment discounted Brezhnev's optimism about the change of correlation of forces in the Third World in favour of socialism within a short span of time, it also left the USSR sufficient room for manoeuvrability. Current leadership believes that the establishment of more durable and sound economic relations coupled with a more sophisticated and flexible diplomatic strategy would be more attractive to the Third World and thereby contribute to strengthening of its position in the region.

In his Vladivostok Speech of July 28, 1986, Gorbachev stated, "Every country has its own social and political system with all the thinkable tinages, its traditions, achievements and difficulties, its mode of life, and its beliefs, convictions and prejudices, its own understanding of spiritual and material values."<sup>60</sup> While such an approach is far more complex and realistic, it is also non-committal in defining or catagorizing the Third World societies on strictly ideological basis. What he clearly realized is that "This impressive diversity, this colossal human and sociopolitical massif calls for *apt attention, study and respect*" (emphasis added).<sup>61</sup> This focus on *apt attention, study and respect* appears to have far reaching

60. "The Vladivostok Speech," *Strategic Digest*, (September, 1987), p. 1735.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 1736



implications. When he referred to the "revived sense of national dignity" as an "immense creative force" and mentioned that "the national identity of people in its organic relationship with other equal and free people" can play a constructive role,<sup>62</sup> Gorbachev made clear what he wanted to respect particularly. Unlike Brezhnev, Gorbachev recognises that nationalism remains the single-most dominant value in the Third World. This factor would significantly influence—if not determine—future Soviet policy towards the Third World.

Gorbachev and his colleagues will also study the Third World. As Kremlin remains preoccupied with domestic problems, it is not in a hurry. As one Western analyst observed, while Khrushchev believed in a one-generation transformation from national liberation to socialism, now the Soviets think it may take 100 years or more to make that change.<sup>63</sup> Gorbachev himself also indicated the same way while talking to the Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez. He said, "we favour socialism, but we do not impose our convictions on anyone. Let everyone choose for himself, and history will eventually put everything in its place."<sup>64</sup> However, he must be equally aware of the fact that it is a violation of Marxist-Leninist precept to fail to influence the historical process with conscious efforts. Therefore, as a communist Gorbachev must also remain concerned as to how to influence the course of history in the socialist way while not imposing socialism on anyone. His approach, it seems would be quite different from that of his predecessors.

Gorbachev visualizes the developing countries playing a crucial role in the emerging balance of economic and political forces. This in his opinion is "an original role in shaping the world economy of the future."<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, Gorbachev is also aware that although they (Third World states) have "already turned into a

62. *Ibid.*

63. See, *Newsweek*, (April 25, 1988), p. 10

64. *Ibid.*

65. Gorbachev, quoted in, *South*, (May 1988), p. 9.



noticeable factor in world politics, none of them has yet fully revealed its full potentialities.”<sup>66</sup> Therefore, Gorbachev judged it to be prudent to proceed with caution in his efforts to overcome the legacies of Brezhnev in the Third World and to break new grounds.

Gorbachev has formulated his new Third World policy which clearly indicates the departure from the position of his predecessors. In addition, he has also come out with a new set of ideas about the Third World in the broader spectrum of contemporary international relations in general and the East-West and super power relations in particular. What follows here is a discussion on the main highlights of these changes under Gorbachev.

### **Socialist Oriented Countries**

As already indicated, out of certain degree of frustration, by the 1970s the USSR began to actively promote “socialist oriented states” governed by self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist vanguard parties (MLVPs). In cases where such parties did not exist the policy was to encourage their organisation and eventual growth. These states significantly differed from previous generation of Soviet allies in two ways ; first, they adhered to scientific socialism in contrast with African, Islamic or democratic socialism which put them closer to the USSR ideologically; second, they were less nationalistic and therefore, had little constraint in close cooperation with the USSR. Initially, there have been high degree of optimism and satisfaction with regard to their performance and reliability. However, the Soviets were soon disillusioned by their experiences in countries like Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Kampuchea, PDR Yemen, and others.<sup>67</sup>

Even during the hay days of this policy, some scholars like Karen Brutents has been consistantly sceptical about the possibility of building genuinely socialist institutions in backward countries and instead suggested the development of Soviet relations with the

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66. Gorbachev quoted in *Ibid*.

67. Difficulties faced by them have been discussed in the previous section.



important capitalist oriented countries.<sup>68</sup> Already during Brezhnev's lifetime, Soviet writings were growing more and more critical about socialist orientation and MLVPs. They expressed doubts about the ability of socialist oriented countries to face the problems of nation building. According to this school the choice of progressive orientation is not sufficient for putting up a relatively reliable barrier against such negative phenomena like corruption, nepotism, inefficiency, stagnation or non-democratic government.<sup>69</sup> Soviet scholars were also showing concern about ultraleftist trends in these countries. Thus, Simonia referred to the experience of Afghanistan to show the magnitude of "damage that can be inflicted on society" by overzealous efforts to accelerate social transformation.<sup>70</sup> However, the main focus became the failure of these countries to carry out their programmes of socioeconomic development. Georgy Kim, for instance, expressed caution that "the very scope of measures planned and carried out in the socialist oriented countries indicates that the non-capitalist road to development is fraught with contradictions and specific difficulties."<sup>71</sup> Soviet concern about the difficulties faced by the socialist oriented countries were expressed in a major collective work, authored by such prominent specialists like Brutents, Ulianovsky, Anatoli Gromyko, Primakov and others. The work carefully spells out how far these countries fall short of expectation and examines the difficulties faced by them with regard to socialist construction as well as the organisation of MLVPs.<sup>72</sup>

68. See, Francis Fukuyama, "Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy", *Problems of Communism*, (September-October 1987), p. 5.

69. See, V. Sheinis, "O Kriteriakh Sotsial'nogo Progressa v Razvivayush chikhsya stranakh", (On Criteria of Social Progress in the Developing Countries) *Narodi Azii i Afriki*, (No. 5, 1981), p. 66.

70. N. Simonia, "Sovremenniy etap osvoboditel'noi bor'bi", ("Contemporary Stage of Liberation Struggle,") *Azla i Afrika Sevogniya*, (No. 5, 1981), pp. 15-16.

71. Georgy Kim, quoted in, Joseph G. Whelan and Micheal J. Dixon, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

72. See, Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, "Revelutionary Changes in the Third World : Recent Soviet Assessments," *World Politics*, (Vol. XXXVIII, No. 3, 1986), pp. 417-419.



A major departure in Soviet thinking on and practical policy towards the socialist oriented countries was initiated by Urii Andropov in his speech to the CC Plenum on June 15, 1983. After routine mention of Soviet Union's close relations and solidarity with the countries of socialist orientation he stated that, "We see, of course, both the complexity of their position and the difficulties of their revolutionary development. *It is one thing to proclaim socialism as one's aim and quite another to build it.* For this, a certain level of productive forces, culture, and social consciousness are needed. Socialist countries express solidarity with these progressive states, render assistance to them in the sphere of politics and culture and promote the strengthening of their defence. *We contribute also, to the extent of our ability, to their economic development. But on the whole, their economic development, just as the entire social progress of those countries, can (of course) be only the result of the work of their peoples and of a correct policy of their leadership.* (emphasis added).<sup>73</sup> Andropov's expression of solidarity with the socialist oriented countries has rather been routine pronouncement which deserves less attention. Three points have been most important in his speech. First, he clearly realized the 'complexity' of internal and international position of these countries as well as 'difficulties' faced by them in building economic infrastructure and political superstructure. It was a clear-cut realisation on his part that effort to build socialism attained little success despite all out commitment. Second, he also stated that socialism could not be built by merely political proclamation, for this, a certain degree of physical and socio-cultural preparation is needed. The level of a nation's productive forces, cultural and social consciousness are vital in this context. By this, he of course, referred to what in Marxist-Leninist terms is called 'objective conditions' for building socialism. This was not only an attack

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73. Quoted in, Francis Fukuyama, *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World*, (The Rand Corporation, R-3337-USDP, Santa Monica, February 1986), p. 18.



against his Third World allies, who proclaimed socialism without having necessary preconditions, but also against the policies of his predecessor who encouraged them and involved the USSR in these ventures politically, economically and even militarily. Third, he made it clear to his allies that they must take the responsibility of their socio-economic development by themselves and the Soviet Union would contribute to this only to the extent of its ability. Andropov's statement is significant at least for the fact that this is the first such pronouncement delivered from the highest level of Soviet leadership. Subsequently, the themes of this statement would be crystalized by Soviet academic experts.

During the recent years, most of Soviet Third World experts turned to be more and more candid and critical about socialist orientation and MLVPs. Most striking has been the evaluation of Rastislav Ulianovsky, once among the strongest proponents of socialist orientation and MLVPs. Now, he considers that "declarative radicalism ... may make the situation worse by triggering sharp internal opposition to the regime."<sup>74</sup> Referring to the shortcomings of MLVPs, he pointed out that "they have not laid the groundwork for socialism by securing mass support, with the result that they have incurred the hostility of the majority in many of these countries."<sup>75</sup> However, it would not be fair to think that every body in Soviet academia lost confidence in socialist orientation. For instance, the tone of a recent article by Anatoli Gromyko has been less critical and more favourable to socialist orientation. While discussing difficulties faced by them, he referred mainly to such factors, like mistakes, lack of expertise, imperialist plunder and others. At the same time, he showed a distinct unwillingness to back from previous policy.<sup>76</sup> He, however, does not belong to the mainstream of Soviet scholars on the issue.

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74. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

75. *Ibid.*

76. See, Anatoli Gromyko, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-35.



Gorbachev's tasks on the issue are rather complicated. While motive behind Andropov's already discussed speech was to initiate a wide policy discussion, Gorbachev had to formulate a well-defined policy and implement it. First and foremost task facing Gorbachev, in this regard, was to refrain Third World radicals from embarking upon a policy of socialist revolution and making efforts to build socialism in the countries where necessary objective and subjective preconditions do not exist. With this end in view, in the XXVII Congress of the CPSU held in February 25, 1986, he recalled Lenin versus "Left-Communists" and Trotskyites debate.<sup>77</sup> He cited Lenin to make his case strong that "Left-Communist" and Trotskyite position of carrying socialism to other countries by military means "would be completely at variance with Marxism, for Marxism has always been opposed to 'pushing' revolutions, which develop with the growing acuteness of the class antagonisms that engender revolutions."<sup>78</sup> In the same speech, he also made it clear that today too, the Soviet communists are firmly convinced that "promoting revolutions from outside, and even more so by military means, is futile and inadmissible".<sup>79</sup> Thus, Gorbachev decisively backed from Brezhnev's policy of 'pushing' revolutions to backward Third World countries and demonstrated a distinct unwillingness to undertake Afghan-type venture.

His second task with regard to socialist oriented countries is to lessen economic, military and political commitment made by Brezhnev. Ineluctable dilemma facing Gorbachev is that while he can not avoid the lessening of Soviet commitment to these allies, he also can not afford to create an impression, either at home or abroad, that he became the Secretary General of the CPSU—to paraphrase Churchill—to preside over the liquidation of socialist

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77. We have discussed this debate in Part I of the Paper.

78. See, Mikhail Gorbachev, *Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th Party Congress*, (Novosti Press Agency, Moscow, 1986), p. 13.

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.



oriented states. Faced with such a predicament, he took a two-pronged policy. On the one hand, the USSR under Gorbachev is making more and more clear to its socialist oriented allies that they must take the responsibility of their socioeconomic development as well as defence by themselves, seek political reconciliation at home and improve relations with their neighbours and pursue a pragmatic policy with regard to economic and political interaction with the West. On the other hand, the USSR is also maintaining its political, economic and military commitment to its allies to the extent that is necessary to avoid any humiliation. At the same time, the USSR is also making it clear to the West, particularly to the US, that the latter also have a stake and responsibility in ensuring that the Soviets could withdraw from some of their previous positions with 'dignity' and also in not taking the advantage of that withdrawal.

### **Capitalist Oriented States**

Soviet Union's frustration with the socialist oriented states and its growing isolation in the Third World generated a renewed interest in economically and geo-politically important capitalist oriented states. Already during Brezhnev's life-time, this trend in Soviet thinking was vividly expressed in a number of academic writings. One of the most consistent protagonists of developing Soviet Union's cooperation with capitalist oriented countries is Karen Brutents. Growing Soviet isolation in the Third World and Western efforts to reclaim their lost influence at the cost of the Soviet Union have been his prime concern. Brutents' main objective was to find out ideological justification and way for broadening the rank of countries in the Third World with whom the USSR can develop its cooperation in economic and political spheres. Even in 1979 he renewed the emphasis on national capitalism in which the state worked for economic independence by establishing effective control over the activities of foreign companies and promoted the



prosperity of the indigenous middle and petty bourgeoisie,<sup>80</sup> thus making a case for greater cooperation with capitalist oriented countries.

In 1982, in an article published in *Pravda* he came forward with a policy proposition suggesting the broadening of Soviet relations with capitalist oriented countries.<sup>81</sup> While discussing the plight of the Third World countries, he portrayed them as the victim of imperialist policy of crude pressure, diktat and strong-arms methods. In this regard, Soviet cooperation with them made the Western powers as their chief target. Implicit in this was a realization that Western pressure has been successful in loosening Soviet ties with the Third World countries. To reverse the trend, Brutents came forward with a clear proposition. First, he suggested that there is a solid base for cooperation with "those liberated countries where capitalist relations are developing but which pursue a policy of defending and strengthening national sovereignty in politics and economics." To this group of states, along with India, he also included countries like, Brazil and Mexico. Second, he also expressed optimism about expanding Soviet ties with countries which are still in many ways dependent on the West in matters of politics, economics and foreign policy.

Ideas expressed in this article have been subsequently developed in a number of his writings during post-Brezhnev period where he put particular emphasis on the existence of significant contradictions between the Third World countries and the West.<sup>82</sup> Subse-

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80. See, Thomas J. Zamostny. "Moscow and the Third World: Recent Trends in Soviet Thinking", *Soviet Studies*, (Vol. XXXVI, No. 2, 1984), p. 229.

81. Karen Brutents, "Sovetskii Soyuz i Osvobodivshiesya Strany: Voprosy Teorii" (The Soviet Union and the Liberated Countries: Questions of Theory), *Pravda*, (February 2, 1982), pp. 4-5.

82. See, Jerry F. Hough, *The Struggle for the Third World : Soviet Debates and American Options*, (The Brookings Institution, Washington, 1986), p. 236.



quently, this theme was picked up by a number of Soviet commentators, scholars as well as leaders, who added new dimensions to it. Aleksandr Bovin, for instance, pointed out that while some Third World countries are extremely impoverished, others—such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea—have enabled them modernise substantially, thus indicating that a certain degree of socio-economic progress is possible, even when they are within world capitalist economy.<sup>83</sup>

Aleksandr Yakovlev is optimistic about Soviet ability to take the advantage of the contradictions not only between the West and the Third World, but also that within the Western bloc. Thus, in a recent article he stated, “among the consequences engendered by the operation of the law of unevenness in our age is the appearance of sufficiently strong young national capitalist states—the ‘newly industrialized countries’—which are at the same time both the object and agent of economic expansion. They—for instance, Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico—have their own monopolistic groups, in certain cases capable of entering the struggle against the ‘old’ industrial empires... One must suppose that in the historically foreseeable future, the centrifugal trend—toward the growth of interimperialist contradictions and the further splintering of the centripetal capitalist world of the postwar decades—will actively resist the centripetal forces”.<sup>84</sup>

Brutents-Yakovlev line appears to be playing decisive role in shaping Soviet policy towards the capitalist oriented countries in the Third World. The new Party Programme adopted at the 27th CPSU Congress states, “relations between the Soviet Union and newly free countries have demonstrated that there also exists a realistic basis for cooperation with those young states that are following the capitalist road of development”.<sup>85</sup> This basis consists,

83. See , Thomas J. Zamostny, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

84. Quoted in Francis Fukuyama, “Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy”, *Problems of Communism*, (September-October 1987), pp. 6-7.

85. *The Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*. (Novosti Press Agency, Moscow, 1986), p. 71.



among others, in a sharpening contradiction between the interests of peoples and the imperialist policy of diktat and expansion ; and in an understanding by young states of the fact that political and economic ties with the Soviet Union help to strengthen their independence.<sup>86</sup> The inclusion of such a policy direction in the Party Programme indicates that Gorbachev has taken the matter seriously and also as a part of his long-term strategy. In this connection, it needs to be stressed that Brezhnev was also not against co-operation with capitalist oriented countries. However, Gorbachev's approach differs from that of Brezhnev in a number of ways. First, in contrast with Brezhnev, Gorbachev is in favour of a shift in Soviet focus of attention toward the geo-politically important capitalist oriented countries. Second, it is a less ideological and more pragmatic approach. Instead of pursuing ideological goals, Gorbachev appears to be more inclined to take the advantage of contradictions between the West and the Third World capitalist oriented states. At the same time, he is also putting emphasis on global interdependence. This duality in his approach is likely to persist. Third, in contrast with his predecessor's bias for political and security matters, economic considerations are gaining more and more preeminence in Gorbachev's approach.

#### **Economic Cooperation and Military Assistance**

Elsewhere in this paper it has been argued that economic stringencies caused by unbearable cost of maintaining allies, decline in economic growth and increasing burden of the continuing arms race with the US coupled with the tasks of revitalizing and rennovating its economy played decisive role in bringing about a radical change in Soviet foreign policy in general and its policy towards the Third World in particular. Attention is focused below on how and to what extent they have changed Soviet thinking on and policy towards economic and military assistance to the Third World countries as well as overall approach to international economic cooperation.

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86. *Ibid.*



The theme of economic stringency was taken up by a number of officials already during Brezhnev's lifetime. Some official statements and academic writings suggest that the Soviets were becoming aware of their declining ability to provide economic assistance to the Third World countries due to heavy burden to maintain a rough equivalence of military might with the West.<sup>87</sup>

One of the most candid discussions on the subject was initiated by Urii Novopashin, a renowned specialist on socialist economics. In an article entitled "The Influence of Real Socialism on the World Revolutionary Process : Methodological Aspects,"<sup>88</sup> he asserted that "real socialism influences the revolutionary process by its very existence and development" and that by "realizing the noble ideas of social justice, of social equality and general well-being ... (real socialism) widely influences universal development". Thus, he argued that best Soviet help to the revolutionary process would be the development of the USSR as an attractive model of economic growth and just social relations.

Novopashin candidly discusses the economic performance of socialist states. He cites statistics showing a dramatic decline in almost all indicators of economic performance in CMEA countries in the later half of the 1970s and acknowledged that the trend has continued into the 1980s. These shortcomings, suggests Novopashin, put the Soviet Union at a disadvantageous position in economic competition with the West in the developing countries. More important, the same shortcomings hampered socialism's ability to provide an attractive alternative to capitalism.

In addition to making a strong argument in favour of domestic socio-economic and political reforms, Novopashin suggested a set

87. See, Thomas J. Zamostny, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

88. Discussion on Novopashin's article is based on : Francis Fukuyama, *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World*, (The Rand Corporation, R-3337-USDP, Santa Monica, February 1986), p. 17; Joseph G. Whelan and Michael J. Dixon, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42; and Thomas J. Zamostny *op. cit.*, pp. 231-232.



of rather unorthodox recommendations With a view to restructuring the strategy of Soviet aid to the Third World: (a) Greater selectivity in choosing client states. A more discriminating approach, he implies, would not only save some money but also enhance Soviet international prestige by avoiding compromising ties with repressive antipopular regimes. (b) Greater co-ordination among socialist states in their Third World aid policies in order to compete with the West. (c) A shift in emphasis in economic assistance from developing basic industry to increasing agricultural production which would be mutually beneficial.

The themes of Novopashin's articles was picked up by many other, particularly some higher-ranking Soviet officials. We have already discussed Andropov's statement devoted to the issue in his speech to the CC plenum on June 15, 1983. Later on, another Politbureau member of Andropov period, Aliev even frankly said in Hanoi that in helping Vietnam to develop its economy, "the Soviet people have to share things they need themselves".<sup>89</sup>

Under Gorbachev, Kremlin is becoming more and more cautious in selecting allies and making specific commitments to them. In contrast with 25th and 26th Congress political report, Gorbachev in his report to the 27th Congress of the CPSU refrained from making any economic commitment to the Third World. Instead, he focused his emphasis on the socio-economic and political development of the USSR and indicated that the Soviet Union will exert its influence on the developing countries by its successes rather than aids. He even mentioned that the world of developing nations is "looking for its choice, for its road, and what this choice will be depends to a larger extent on socialism's successes, on the credibility of its answers to the challenges of time".<sup>90</sup>

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89. See, *Pravda*, November 1, 1983.

90. See, Mikhail Gorbachev, *Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th Party Congress*. (Novosti Press Agency, Moscow, 1986), pp. 86-87.



Gorbachev has also brought some remarkable changes in Soviet overall approach to bilateral and multilateral cooperation with both the Western and Third World countries.<sup>91</sup> In Soviet official pronouncements under Gorbachev, frequent use of such terms as 'interdependence', 'integration requirements of economy', 'division of labour', 'joint ventures' etc. is striking, particularly, as they appear without traditional Marxist interpretations implying their relevance to economic cooperation with capitalist countries as well.<sup>92</sup> Traditionally the USSR rejected Western dominated international economic organizations as instruments of collective colonialism. Recently it has approached the IMF, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for cooperation. Gorbachev expressed Soviet willingness to participate in the new round of multilateral trade negotiations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The Soviets are also interested to play an active role in the activities of ESCAP.<sup>93</sup> The Soviet Union is taking a keen interest in the Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference (PECC). It has participated in the fifth session of the PECC held at Vancouver, Canada, in November 1988 as observer and then it asked to be upgraded to a full-fledged membership.<sup>94</sup> Thus, along with careful selection of allies in and overall reduction of its economic commitment to the Third World, the USSR is also cautiously and slowly embarking upon a policy of greater participation in multi-lateral economic cooperation in association with the developed West.

91. For more details on the subject, see, A.K.M. Abdus Sabur, "Gorbachev's Policy towards the Asia-Pacific Region", *BISS Journal*, (Vol. 9, No. 1 1988), pp. 89-90.

92. See, for example, "The Vladivostok Speech", *op. cit.*, p. 1737; "Mikhail Gorbachev's Interview to Indonesian Newspaper "Mardeka", (*Strategic Digest*, September, 1987), p. 1725; Mikhail S. Kapitsa, "Soviet initiative for Peace in Asia-Pacific", *India International Centre Quarterly* (Summer 1987), p. 46; and *Pravda*, April 24, 1985.

93. For details See, Hiroshi Kimura, "Soviet Focus on the Pacific", *Problems of Communism*, (May-June 1987) pp. 14-15.

94. *Ibid.* p. 15.



Soviet economic stringencies would influence its policy with regard to military assistance to the same extent as it does in case of economic assistance. However, the implications on the military front are two fold : first, the reduced hard currency returns to be expected from Soviet oil exports coupled with economic strignencies discussed above will generate increased economic incentives for the Soviet Union to maximize hard currency earnings from arms deliveries; Second, the same factors will reduce further the proportion of arms exports that is furnished to some clients without hard currency repayment. Such a trend is already visible. According to preliminary estimates, Soviet arms sales in 1987 amounted to about \$ 16 billion—a 25 per cent increase over the previous year. With oil prices still depressed arms sale account for about 53 per cent of the Soviet Union's hard currency earnings.<sup>95</sup>

### Third World Conflicts and Superpower Relations

We have already discussed how Soviet extraordinary activism in the Third World and renewed US determination to face the Soviet challenge hampered the process of East-West *detente*. Initially the Soviets rejected the idea that there is any relation between the *detente* and Soviet activism in the Third World. However, by early 1980s, such eminent Soviet personalities like, Georgii Arbatov and Aleksandr Bovin began to stress that Third Word issues had been impeding the process of the more important Soviet-US relationship. It has been reflected in their eagerness to find out some 'rules' that would regulate Soviet-US competition in the Third World.<sup>96</sup>

It appears that Brezhnev himself was aware of the consequences of unrestricted Soviet-US competition in the Third World on broader East-West and superpower relations. In the wake of the 26th Congress of the CPSU, on April 27, 1981, he proposed

95. See, *Newsweek*, (April 25, 1988), p. 11.

96. See, Francis Fukuyama, *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World*. (Rand Corporation, K-3337 USDP, Santa Monica; February, 1986, pp. 24-25,



the establishment of a 'code of conduct' governing superpower behaviour in the Third World. The proposal indicated a certain degree of flexibility in Soviet approach with regard to its freedom of activities in the Third World.<sup>97</sup> Brezhnev's proposal has been totally ignored by the US. It was due to the fact that following the Afghan crisis Brezhnev's credibility to the US reached its lowest ebb and with Reagan at the helm, Washington indicated a distinct willingness to deal with the Soviet Union from the position of strength.

Brezhnev's proposal for a 'code of conduct' for the superpowers was taken up by Urii Andropov. He also could involve his Warsaw pact allies in it. Prague Declaration issued at the conclusion of the Warsaw Pact meeting on January 4-5, 1983, emphasized its concern over the broader international consequences of regional and local conflicts. It also repeated the ideas set forth in Brezhnev's proposal for a 'code of conduct' adding to it some new contents.<sup>98</sup>

During Gorbachev a more or less well-defined Soviet policy with regard to regional conflicts gradually took shape. In his political report to the 27th Congress of the CPSU, Gorbachev stated that "We are in favour of vitalising collective quests for ways of defusing conflict situations in the Middle East, Central America, Southern Africa, and in all of the planet's turbulent points".<sup>99</sup> In practice as well, the USSR is seeking political solution to the Third World conflicts where it is directly or indirectly involved and also trying to mediate—preferably in partnership with the US—in resolving regional conflicts with a view to ensuring an internationally accepted role for itself in the Third World diplomacy, commensurate with its role as a superpower. Evidence suggests that Gorbachev appears to have in his mind a 'code of conduct' by which all states would

97. See, *Ibid.*, p. 25.

98. See, Joseph G. Whelan and Michael J. Dixon, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

99. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th Congress*, (Novosti Press Agency, Moscow, 1986), p. 87,



be guided in their interaction with each other. Such an idea was advanced by him in his proposal for *an all-embracing system of international security* contained in his report to the 27th Congress of the CPSU.<sup>100</sup>

### **Reorganisation of Foreign Policy Apparatus.**

Gorbachev's new policy towards the Third World is complemented by important changes in Soviet foreign policy apparatus. His innovations have been in the areas of personnel, structure and priorities. Gorbachev has removed his chief contender for power Romanov from the Politbureau. Romanov was a hard-liner who advocated a more confrontational approach to the USA and was far less willing than Gorbachev to make concessions on arms control issues. On the other hand, Yakovlev has witnessed a meteoric rise in the Politbureau. He now coordinates Soviet propaganda on international relations and has emerged as a close adviser to Gorbachev on foreign policy matters. Gromyko, a relatively uncompromising figure who served for thirty years as Foreign Minister was promoted to the largely ceremonial position of state presidency. He was replaced by Shevardnadze, a Gorbachev loyalist. Gorbachev has also reshuffled nearly all the senior officials in the Foreign Ministry and appointed nearly 40 key ambassadors around the world.<sup>101</sup>

Perhaps the most dramatic has been the changes in the International Department of the Central Committee. The International Department—which succeeded the Comintern—until very recently was responsible for conducting communications with and promoting world revolutionary process. It was also staffed by largely Third World specialists noted for their ideological fervor. Currently, the department oversees Soviet policy towards both the West and the Third World. Its principal task appears to have more to do with the Soviet-US and broader East-West relations than following develop-

100. See, *Ibid*, pp. 92-94.

101. See, Kurt M. Campbell, "Southern Africa in Soviet Foreign Policy", *Adelphi Papers*, (No. 227, Winter 1987/88), p. 52.



ments in the Third World. This changed priority determined the recent changes in the Department's personnel. Ponomarev—a Comintern veteran with special interest and expertise in national liberation movements and world revolutionary process—who served the department as its head since the 1950s was retired in 1986.

A prominent proponent of socialist orientation and a deputy head of the Department responsible for Third World affairs, Ulianovsky was also retired.<sup>102</sup> The new head Anatoly Dobrynin is a professional diplomat and a long-serving Soviet ambassador to Washington. His first deputy Vitalii Shaposhnikov is a specialist on West Europe. A number of similar changes in other Soviet foreign policy establishments as well brought to the forefront people with expertise in the US and West Europe who are less concerned about the developments in the Third World.<sup>103</sup> One Third World specialist, Karen Brutents is gaining more and more prominence in recent years. A staunch advocate of courting economically and geopolitically important capitalist oriented countries in the Third World, Brutents is a deputy head of the International Department. Initially responsible for the Middle East and Latin America, he has probably held the portfolio for the rest of the Third World as well since the retirement of Ulianovsky.<sup>104</sup>

Gorbachev's reorganisation of foreign policy apparatus is significant in many ways. The replacement of old guard by a younger, more pragmatic and innovative generation would add new dynamism to Soviet foreign policy. The promotion of cadres close to Gorbachev both politically and to a certain extent personally would increase his overall command over foreign policy. Reorganisation of the International Department coupled with the

102. See, Francis Fukuyama, "Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy", *Problems of Communism*, (September-October 1987), p. 6.

103. For details, See, Peter Shearman, "Gorbachev and the Third World: an Era of Reform," *Third World Quarterly*, (Vol. 9, No. 4, 1987), p. 1088.

104. See, Francis Fukuyama, "Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy", *Problems of Communism*, (September-October 1987), p. 5.



replacement of Gromyko as Foreign Minister by Shevardnadze would increase the role of the International Department in foreign policy matters. In fact, through the changes in foreign policy establishment, Gorbachev appears to be creating a powerful apparatus made up of hand-picked aides to oversee and co-ordinate foreign policy from the Central Committee, obviously under his guidance.

#### IV

##### **The New Policy in Action**

The process of the implementation of post-Brezhnev Soviet policy towards the Third World has been more complex and controversial than the process of its formulation and was also marked by numerous zig-zags. A number of factors may be mentioned here. First, while post-Brezhnev leadership, Andropov and Gorbachev in particular, had to justify at home the departure from the past in terms of its costs and benefits for the Soviet Union, they also had to prove their sincerity abroad. Second, Soviet alliance relationship with socialist oriented countries—as the case with any alliance—was conceived within the frame of entanglement versus abandonment psychosis. The Soviet decision to withdraw from some of its previous positions in the Third World was partially motivated by its fear of further entanglement in distant places with insignificant interest. This decision, however, generated deep fear among Soviet allies that they could be abandoned by the USSR. Therefore, while making withdrawal the dilemma for Gorbachev was also to convince its allies and adversaries that it does not mean Soviet abandonment of its allies. Finally, while withdrawing from some of its previous positions, the Soviet Union also had to ensure that these positions were not taken over by the US. Such an eventuality would severely undermine Soviet position abroad and Gorbachev's position at home.



Despite all complications, Gorbachev has ventured to act for getting rid of at least some of its major military, economic and diplomatic burdens already undertaken during Brezhnev period. Geneva Accord on Afghanistan signed on April 14, 1988, between Pakistan and Afghanistan to resolve the Afghan crisis is the most illustrated example. In addition to Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Accord was also signed by the US and the USSR as its co-guarantors. Its provisions are as follows : (i) Moscow will withdraw its troops from Afghanistan over a nine month period, starting from May 15, 1988; (ii) non-interference in each others internal affairs (which in practical terms means that Pakistan should no more provide the Afghan rebels with shelter and weapons); and (iii) safe return of Afghan refugees to their homeland.<sup>105</sup> The decision to withdraw from Afghanistan can be characterised as a limited Soviet defeat. However, the game may not be over. All the parties concerned, the Afghan government, the Mujahedins, Pakistan, the Soviet Union and the United States, clearly realise and openly recognise that a bloodbath is ahead.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, the Afghan problem would continue to remain both as an opportunity as well as a challenge to the parties concerned.

On the part of Gorbachev, his decision to withdraw from Afghanistan reflected his determination to get rid of the worst legacy of Brezhnev which in addition to causing enormous drain of human and material resources of the Soviet Union, was also paralysing Soviet diplomatic efforts in international arena. One possible outcome of the Accord is that the tide of anti-Sovietism generated by Brezhnev's heavy-handed policy may gradually decline.

With regard to Afghanistan itself, Gorbachev has taken a calculated risk. If Najibullah government can survive without

105. *Asiaweek*, (April 29, 1988), p. 16.

106. See, *Ibid*, pp. 17-18; and also, *Newsweek*, (May 9, 1988), p. 21.



the presence of Soviet troops, even at the cost of major concessions on power sharing and politico-ideological issues, it would be a tremendous victory for Gorbachev and enhance his position both at home and abroad. The replacement of Najibullah government with a non-communist one which would be truly non-aligned and would maintain good neighbourly relations with the Soviet Union would certainly seal off Soviet limited defeat. However, it would also represent a face saving device for the Soviet Union. But, the replacement of Najibullah with the extremely anti-Soviet Islamic fundamentalists would further expose Soviet weakness to its allies as well as adversaries. At home, it could increase resistance to Gorbachev's policies both domestic and foreign.

While for Gorbachev Afghanistan still remains a complicated problem, it also became no less complicated a problem for the United States. After signing as a co-guarantor of the Accord, George Shultz insisted that the US retains the right to send arms to the rebels.<sup>107</sup> In practice, however, it would involve a host of legal and much more complicated political problems. Arms could be channelled to the rebels only through Pakistan, but, after signing as a co-guarantor of the Accord, Washington can not instigate a party to violate the same Accord. While the invention of some legal explanations is not impossible, it would involve the risk that the other party also could invent similar explanations for its non-compliance of the Accord. More important, if Moscow withdraws its troops from Afghanistan, it would be difficult for Washington to justify its arms supply to the rebels both at home and abroad. Most of the regimes in the Third World are dictatorial and a good number of them suffer from legitimacy crisis. Therefore, the question of Najibullah's legitimacy would not serve as an argument convincing enough to justify major US arms shipments to the rebels. At home, such an argument would lack appeal. By withdrawing

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107. See, *Newsweek*, (April 25, 1988), p. 10.



troops from Afghanistan the Soviet Union would meet the demands made by the UN General Assembly and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Unlike in the past, the Soviet Union and the Afghan government are not likely to remain isolated in international arena on the issue.

As already indicated, efforts have been intensified to reduce Soviet costs of maintaining its allies during the 1980s. We have also shown that these costs are declining as a ratio of Soviet GNP since 1981 and in absolute terms since 1982.<sup>108</sup> While latest data are not available, Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and reduced economic and military commitment to its allies would further decrease these costs.

In relation to regional conflicts, multi-lateral economic cooperation and the super power relations over the Third World, some actions have already been undertaken. A 'code of conduct' that would regulate super power relations in the Third World was discussed at high level super power meetings, including the summit level.

Bringing any major change in bilateral economic relations with the Third World countries particularly in trade remains and would continue to remain a difficult challenge. As a source of Third World imports, the USSR remains as unable to compete with the West as it was before. In terms of commodity composition also the Soviet Union with its exports to the Third World dominated by raw materials lags far behind the West. According to Soviet estimates, fuel and raw material products account for 66 percent of its total exports to the capitalist market. Needless to mention, Moscow has also to face the increasing losses due to falling commodity prices. Gorbachev recognised the necessity for the Soviet Union to reduce raw materials as a percentage of exports in favour of manufactured goods.<sup>109</sup> Bringing such a change would need enormous efforts and certainly a long time.

108. See, Table 2.

109. Peter Shearman, *op. cit.*, pp. 1089-80.



In order to stimulate production and raise the quality of Soviet manufactured goods to the extent of competing with the West, Gorbachev has extended his domestic economic restructuring programme (*perestroika*) into the field of foreign economic relations. Only between August 1986 and January 1987, four important new decrees have been ratified which gave increased freedom to a number of large enterprises and ministries to engage independently and directly with foreign companies.<sup>110</sup> Gorbachev has also replaced long-serving Minister for Foreign Trade Nikolai Patolichev with a younger Technocrat with diplomatic experience, Boris Aristov.<sup>111</sup> These measures are yet to bring any substantial change.

Thus, there are at least some reasons for Gorbachev to claim that the "new thinking is also bridging the gap between word and deed."<sup>112</sup> For a better understanding of how and to what extent the gap between word and deed is being bridged we now turn to a more detailed examination of the implementation of the new Soviet policy in four major Third World theatres.

### The Asia-Pacific

The Soviet Union under Gorbachev has accorded the Asia-Pacific region the highest priority in the conduct of its Third World policy. Reasons are obvious. The region has emerged as one of the most important economic, commercial and geostrategic centres of the present day world. It is a vast area washed by the waters of two oceans and currently populated by more than half of the mankind. Gifted with abundant mineral and other resources, the region occupies an important strategic position at the crossroads of dozens of major sea and air routes. During post-War period, the countries of the region witnessed spectacular growth in their

110. *Ibid.*, p. 1090.

111. *Ibid.*

112. Mikhail Gorbachev, "Reality and Guarantees for a Secure World", *International Affairs*, (No. 11, 1988), p. 4.



economies and rapid increase in their share of world trade. The region already accounts for over half of the global industrial output and almost one-third of international trade.<sup>113</sup> These factors are increasingly shifting the balance of importance from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean setting the stage for the new Asia-Pacific era.

The Soviet Union can not remain unprepared to such prospects. It is the largest Asia Pacific power in terms of territory and one of the largest in terms of population. About two-thirds of Soviet territory lies in Asia. Thirty five percent of its population live in the continent. 12000 miles of Soviet Pacific coastline is the longest of any state overlooking the Pacific basin.<sup>114</sup> Another important factor, Gorbachev's programme of the accelerated socioeconomic development of the USSR is paying more attention to the territories beyond the Urals—Siberia and the Soviet Far East—whose economic potential is "several times greater than the assets of the European part of the Soviet Union."<sup>115</sup> All these factors greatly increased Soviet needs for cooperation with the dynamic economies of the Asia-Pacific region.

Gorbachev is the first Soviet leader to grasp clearly the significance of the advent of the new Asia-Pacific era and to initiate a radical change in Soviet approach as well as practical policy towards the region.<sup>116</sup> His preparedness to revise Brezhnev's Asia-Pacific policy was first expressed in his address at a banquet for Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Moscow on May 21, 1985. In his report to the 27th Congress of the CPSU, he more precisely indicated a

113. See, Mikhail S. Kapitsa, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

114. These data are from : O. N. Mehrotra, "Gorbachev's Foreign Policy," *Strategic Analysis*, (Vol. XIII, No. 1, April 1987), p. 31; and *Strategic Studies*, (Vol. IX, No. 4, Summer 1987), p.3.

115. See, "Mikhail Gorbachev's Interview to Indonesian Newspaper 'Mardeka,'" *op. cit.*, p. 1725.

116. A more detailed analysis of Soviet policy towards the region is done in A.K.M. Abdus Sabur, "Gorbachev's Policy Towards the Asia-Pacific Region", *BISS Journal*, (Vol. 9, No. 1, 1988), pp. 66-92.



possible change in Soviet policy towards the region. Subsequently, on 24th April 1986, the Soviet Government issued a statement on the Asia-Pacific region which reflected the official view on and policy objectives towards the region. Finally, on July 28, 1986, Gorbachev delivered an important speech in Vladivostok the principal focus of which has been the Asia-Pacific region. Gorbachev's Vladivostok initiative signalled a significant departure in Soviet policy towards the region from ideological rigidities and bipolarism of Brezhnev era to a more pragmatic, flexible and multi-pronged approach. While Vladivostok initiative was primarily aimed at China, Japan,<sup>117</sup> ASEAN and Oceania, other Soviet pronouncements, including those delivered by Gorbachev suggest India as the centerpiece of Soviet policy towards not only the Asia-Pacific region, but also the Third World as a whole.

All post-Stalin Soviet leaders, Brezhnev in particular, paid significant attention to developing friendly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation with India. For years, the Soviet Union has been India's first or second largest foreign customer and single-most important supplier of sophisticated weapons. India remains one of the most important Third World customers of Soviet goods. Under Gorbachev, however, India has received by far the greatest amount of attention. Apart from Afghanistan, it is the only Third World country to be referred to in Gorbachev's report to the 27th Congress of the CPSU.<sup>118</sup> During the first 20 months of Gorbachev's rule, he met Rajiv Gandhi on four occasions. In May 1985, Rajiv visited Moscow as one of Gorbachev's first guests. Gorbachev returned the visit in November 1986 which was his first visit to a Third World or Asian country. During the course of these meetings,

117. Japan is not a Third World country and neither the Soviet Union nor China views the Sino-Soviet relations in the context of Soviet Third World relations. Therefore, these countries are kept out of the scope of this study.

118. See, Mikhail Gorbachev, *Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th Party Congress*, (Novosti Press Agency, Moscow, 1987), p. 82.



both the sides agreed to a series of wide-ranging economic and military interactions. These included—among others—Soviet commitment of a total credit of 2.5 billion rubles to India; decision to almost quadruple bilateral trade in six years to Rs. 130 billion; and a set of agreements regarding Soviet sales of armaments to India.<sup>119</sup> This renewed emphasis on and heightened economic commitment to India demonstrate Soviet Union's determination to revitalise the already close relationship between the two countries built up over the past three decades. Its significance goes far beyond the parameters of bilateral Indo-Soviet relations alone.

Some recent studies confirmed that Indo-Soviet co-operation is highly beneficial to both the parties from economic point of view and they have a stake in maintaining the present level of cooperation and also in expanding it where it is necessary.<sup>120</sup> They also share a number of common regional interests, including balancing the power of China, Pakistan and the USA in South Asia. Most distinctive characteristic of Indo-Soviet relations is that the Soviet Union has maintained good relations with India without restoring to the application of political or military pressure. It has cautiously avoided interfering in India's internal affairs or applying leverage to gain New Delhi's support on international issues where the interests of the parties do not coincide. India, for its part, is following the capitalist road of development and Western-type of democracy. Internationally it adheres to Non-alignment and has demonstrated a significant degree of independence from both the power blocs.

To Gorbachev, not the impoverished and diplomatically isolated socialist oriented states of Africa, not even Cuba and Vietnam but

119. For more details on Rajiv-Gorbachev parleys and Indo-Soviet Relations, see, Jyotirmoy Banerjee, "Moscow's Indian Alliances", *Problems of Communism*, (January-February 1987), pp. 1-12; and Dilip Mukerjee, "Indo-Soviet Economic Ties", *Problems of Communism*, (January-February 1987), pp. 13-24.

120. See, *Ibid.*



bourgeois nationalist India represents a model for Soviet relations with the Third World countries. During his visit to India Gorbachev more precisely indicated that he visualizes Indo-Soviet relations as a kind of model for Soviet ties with the developing countries. In his address to the Indian parliament, he stated, "To me personally, it is quite obvious that much of what we call new political thinking manifested itself internationally for the first time in relations between the Soviet Union and India. And the fact that differences of socio-political system and ideology and our national, cultural, and other distinctions have not hampered our dialogue is extremely important as a *guiding example for others* (emphasis added).<sup>121</sup> Subsequently, Indo-Soviet relations have been repeatedly referred to in a number of other Soviet pronouncements as a model for its ties with the Third World states.

Attractiveness of such a model could be easily explained both at home and abroad. At home, Gorbachev could put a number of arguments. First, politico-strategic benefits offered by India are less tangible and do not include basing facilities and unconditional diplomatic support. Nonetheless, unlike trade and economic cooperation with socialist oriented countries, those with India do not involve subsidization on the part of the Soviets. They are mutually beneficial. Second, the stability of Indian political system also ensures reasonable stability in Indo-Soviet relations. More important, the Indian government has never in the past looked at Moscow as the guarantor of its survival and almost certainly would not do so in the future. Third, while most of the socialist oriented countries are liabilities for Moscow in international arena, India is an asset. It is highly influential in the Non-aligned Movement and remains in very good standing with most of the Third World countries. India's opinion is also valued by the West, including

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121. Quoted in, Francis Fukuyama, "Patterns of Soviet Third World Relations, *Problems of Communism*, (September-October 1987), p. 7.



the US. Therefore, its support on a number of international issues of mutual concern would carry much greater weight.

The Kremlin chief's policy of favouring Indo-Soviet model may also appear attractive to his Third World counterparts for a couple of reasons. First, as already indicated, the Soviet Union is not so much interested in trying to spread socialism as in developing mutually beneficial co-operation with economically and geopolitically important capitalist oriented countries. Therefore, while such cooperation would lessen Third World countries' dependence on and increase bargaining capability vis-a-vis the West, it also would retain their rights to safeguard their sociopolitical and economic institutions from communist penetration. Second, while developing cooperation with the Soviet Union, the Third World countries would also retain their freedom of action in international arena. They are expected to support the USSR only on the issues of mutual concern and also on reciprocal basis.

In view of the important role played by the countries of ASEAN in the economic and political matters of the Asia-Pacific region, the success of Gorbachev's recent initiatives would depend significantly on Soviet-ASEAN relations. That is why, he has increased his efforts in courting ASEAN countries, although his objectives are still conservative : (i) to prevent ASEAN from being transformed into an anti-Soviet bloc; (ii) to build normal, if possible, friendly state-to-state relations with ASEAN countries; (iii) to ensure unhindered passage for Soviet naval and merchant ships through the sea routes in the region and if possible to obtain harbour facilities in some ASEAN countries; and (iv) to expand economic relations with the regional states in order to secure access to markets and raw materials.

The Soviet Union is facing a dilemma in Southeast Asia which involves a conflict between its new and old agenda. The continuation of Soviet military assistance and diplomatic support to Vietnam on Kampuchea is increasingly alienating the ASEAN countries. On



the other hand, if the Soviet Union stops its military assistance and diplomatic support to Vietnam, the alliance relationship would be meaningless for the latter and the very existence of the alliance would be at stake. As an ally, Vietnam is important to Moscow. It is officially recognised by Moscow as a socialist country and a full member of the CMEA. These factors coupled with the base facilities at Cam Ranh Bay and Da Nang made Vietnam the only Soviet political and military strong-hold in a vast and strategically important region. Therefore, despite the fact that Vietnam became a political liability for the Soviet Union in developing its relations with the ASEAN countries, Gorbachev cannot afford to risk alienating Hanoi. Nonetheless, indications suggest that Gorbachev is putting pressure on Vietnam to reach a political settlement on Kampuchea problem through national reconciliation.<sup>122</sup> While Soviet pressure and the recent change in the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam brought about a certain degree of flexibility in Hanoi's approach to the problem, yet a solution does not appear in sight.

Nevertheless, since Gorbachev came to power, Soviet policy towards the ASEAN has become somewhat more activated and dynamic. In an effort to court ASEAN countries, Gorbachev in his Vladivostok speech, underscored only positive sides of ASEAN and expressed Soviet willingness to expand ties with Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.<sup>123</sup> Recent years witnessed an upsurge in bilateral visits between Soviet officials and their counterparts in ASEAN countries. In October 1985, Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Ryabov visited Indonesia and Malaysia—Kremlin's chief policy targets in the ASEAN. He made efforts to strengthen ties with them through economic channels.<sup>124</sup> During

122. See, Peter Shearman, *op. cit.*, p. 1101; and also, *Time*, (May, 23, 1988, ) p. 15.

123. See, "The Vladivostok Speech", *op. cit.*, pp. 1738-40.

124. See, Yukata Akino, "Gorbachev's New Policy Towards Asia", *The Indonesia Quarterly*, (Vol. XV, No. 3, 1987), pp. 425-26.



1986-1987 a number of Soviet high officials including Shevardnadze and Kapitsa visited the ASEAN countries. The Foreign Ministers of Thailand and Malaysia were hosted at the Kremlin. The Soviets are trying to convince the ASEAN countries that Soviet participation in the economy of the Asia-Pacific region can be a blessing for them, which have been suffering from both, US trade protectionism and deficits in their trade with Japan.<sup>125</sup>

ASEAN response to Gorbachev's overture depends on the perspectives of the concerned countries over continued military presence of Vietnam in Kampuchea, Soviet-Vietnamese alliance and Soviet activities in the region. Indonesia and Malaysia tend to downplay the Vietnamese threat and are less concerned about Soviet objectives in the region. Thailand and Singapore remain vehemently opposed to the military presence of Vietnam in Kampuchea as well as Soviet-Vietnamese alliance. Philippines tend to share Indonesian and Malaysian view point.<sup>126</sup> In recent years, the Soviet Union has managed to improve its bilateral relations with Indonesia. Commercial transactions, particularly Indonesian exports to the USSR are also increasing.<sup>127</sup> As a gesture of goodwill, the Soviet Union offered to train Indonesian astronauts.<sup>128</sup> Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja has assessed the relations between the two countries as "better than correct, almost good." More important for Gorbachev, Kusumaatmadja has been favourably disposed to Vladivostok initiative.<sup>129</sup> Malaysia also seems to have modified its view of Soviet threat to the region. Certain influential circles in Malaysia are now even critical about raising hue and cry

125. *Ibid.*, p. 426.

126. For details, See, A.K.M. Abdus Sabur, "Quest for a Viable Regional Order in South-East Asia : Problems and Prospects", *BISS Journal*, (Vol. 7, No. 4), pp. 498-500.

127. Alexander Papov, "Soviet-Indonesian Trade and Economic Cooperation", *The Indonesia Quarterly*, (Vol. XV, No. 2, 1987), pp. 165-69.

128. *Time*, (May 23, 1981), p. 13.

129. *Asiaweek*, (August 10, 1986), p. 16.



about Soviet danger to Southeast Asia.<sup>130</sup> These developments, however, could neither influence Thailand and Singapore nor bring any substantial change in overall approach of ASEAN towards the Soviet Union. Kampuchea remains the central issue which divides the ASEAN countries from the Soviet Union. Any major breakthrough in Soviet-ASEAN relations would need its settlement.

As a part of its recent drive to expand diplomatic, political and economic ties with the Asia-Pacific countries, the Soviet Union is making persistent efforts to court small island nations of South Pacific. In this regard, some recent developments in the region have seriously undermined US influence and facilitated Soviet efforts. The US relations with its allies, Australia and New Zealand, deteriorated due to latter's anti-nuclear posture. Subsequently, the exit of New Zealand from the ANZUS virtually paralysed the activities of the bloc. More important, on 6 August 1985, at the 16th Session of the South Pacific Forum,<sup>131</sup> held in Rarotonga, the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty—widely known as Rarotonga Treaty—was signed. The main purpose of the Treaty is to ban the presence, in any form, of nuclear weapons on the territories of the signatories to the Treaty.<sup>132</sup> These developments encouraged the USSR to take the advantage of anti-nuclear and concomitant anti-US feelings in the region. It supported the Rarotonga Treaty. Gorbachev even himself criticized the United States, Great Britain and France for their refusal to be parties to the Treaty.<sup>133</sup>

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130. See, Bolveer Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-85.

131. A regional political organization comprising 13 nations : Australia, Cook Islands, Federal States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Western Samoa.

132. See, V.D. Chopra, "Anti-Nuclear Trends in the Southern Asia-Pacific", in Eduardo Faleiro *et. al.*, *Southern Asia-Pacific : Current Trends*, (International Institute for Southern Pacific Studies, New Delhi, 1987), p. 24; and also, *Asiaweek*, (August 17, 1986), p. 16.

133. "Mikhail Gorbachev's Interview to Indonesia Newspaper, 'Mardeka,'" *op. cit.*, p. 1721.



The USSR has been successful in expanding its ties with the island states of South Pacific. It maintains diplomatic relations with Papua New Guinea, Western Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. It is trying to expand its presence and influence in the region through economic inducements to the island states. In this regard, an opportunity was offered by recent US disputes with the island states over the intrusion of US Tuna boats in their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) for fishing.<sup>134</sup> The Soviet Union has taken full advantage of the dispute. In 1985, it concluded an agreement with Kiribati for \$ 1.7 million annual fees which gave it right to fish in an area of two million square miles. In 1987, the Soviet Union concluded a similar agreement with Vanuatu for \$ 1.5 million.<sup>135</sup> These deals have increased Soviet presence and influence in a region where until recently Moscow was almost unknown. It put the United States in sharp alert. Some US sources, including high military officials, expressed deep concern that the Soviet Union could use its facilities in the region for the purpose of intelligence data collection.<sup>136</sup> Given the relatively less importance of these states in overall Soviet policy towards the region, the strategic significance of the South-Pacific to the US and US determination to guard zealously its strategic interests in the region, it is rather unlikely that the Soviet Union would go much beyond diplomatic and commercial ties. One remarkable outcome of this controversy has been the fact that small island states of South Pacific, almost unknown to international community, came to the limelight and they have significantly increased their bargaining capability *vis-a-vis* the US.

### **The Middle East and the Persian Gulf**

The Soviet Union has a growing interest in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region because of its strategic location,

134. For details on the dispute see, *Asiaweek*, (August 14, 1986), p. 20.

135. See, "Interview with James A. Lyons Jr., Admiral, U.S. Navy, C-in-C, Pacific Fleet", *Strategic Digest*, (September, 1987), pp. 1746-47.

136. See, *Ibid.*, p. 1747 ; and also, *Asiaweek* (August 24, 1986), p. 21.



huge oil resources, existing volatile political environment and proximity to its predominantly Muslim populated Southern border. Immediate aims of Soviet diplomacy in the region are: (i) to weaken the links of Middle East states with the West, particularly with the US; (ii) to contain those alliances and agreements which are directed against the Soviet interests; (iii) to establish and develop friendly or at least normal state-to-state relations with the countries of the region; (iv) to ensure unhindered passage for Soviet naval and merchant ships, and if possible, to obtain harbour facilities in as more regional countries as possible; (v) to maintain the already achieved level of cooperation with the radical Arab states and expand them where possible; (vi) and finally, to expand trade, economic and technical cooperation as well as cultural relations with all countries of the region, obviously except Israel.

When Gorbachev assumed the helm of Kremlin, the Soviet Union was facing a number of adverse developments which have already eroded much of Soviet presence and influence in the region achieved for decades and at a high price. Moreover, diplomatic trends were further moving against Soviet interests. Anti-Israeli Arab unity sought by the USSR fell apart as a consequence of US-sponsored Camp David Accords signed by Egypt and Israel which obtained covert blessing of the oil-rich conservative Arab regimes. It did not take the Soviet Union long to realize that the prospects for anti-Israeli, more so anti-US Arab unity—with participation of any significant number of Arab states—are bleak in the foreseeable future. So is the prospect for the Soviet Union to reemerge as the defender of Arab cause against US-backed Israel. The truth, however unpleasant it may be to Gorbachev, is that the mainstream Arab states were allied to the US on anti-Soviet basis. Moreover, continued presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan was sustaining the momentum of anti-Soviet wave and paralysing Soviet diplomatic moves in the region.



Arab radicals failed to emerge as a counterbalance to the alliance of conservative and moderate states. Moreover, they continued to be torn by numerous conflicts among themselves. Syria and Lybia were becoming more and more isolated in the Arab world and they were also being discredited in the West as the sponsors of international terrorism.

The continuation of Iran-Iraq war was also being considered by the Soviets as detrimental to their interests as it was further strengthening US position in and influence over the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, both the countries were expected by the Soviet Union to assume highly anti-Israeli and anti-US position.

Soviet rejection of Camp David Accords and anti-Egypt bias of its relations with Arab radicals, Syria and Libya in particular, coupled with anti-Soviet position assumed by Egypt on a number of international issues thwarted the normalization of Soviet Egyptian relations. Meanwhile, Egypt was returning to the Islamic and even to the Arab fold. Egypt's readmission to the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1984, to the Islamic Development Bank in February 1985 and to the Arab Sports Union in August 1985 are indicative of such a trend. In these circumstances, Soviet-Egyptian deadlock was becoming more and more counterproductive to the Soviet Union.

The lack of diplomatic interactions with Israel and the persistence of super power Cold War discounted any prospect that the Soviet Union could participate in the Middle East peace process at par with the US. Such line of thinking has been reinforced by recent US efforts to arrange talks between Israel on the one hand and Jordan and the PLO on the other to settle the Middle East problem.

Nonetheless, as seen from Moscow, the situation is not frustrating altogether. Arab-Israeli conflict is certain to persist. So is the US support for Israel. This would continue to drive the anti-Israeli radical Arab regimes closer to the Soviet Union as a



counterbalance to the US in the region. More importantly, whatever may be the current policies of the majority of Arab regimes, there is a deep underlying psychological drive for unity in the Arab world on anti-Israeli and for that matter anti-US basis. The Soviets cannot perhaps overlook these factors in formulating their long-term strategy. A further point for consideration in this regard is that the region is turmoiled by endemic political crises and upheavals and the regimes everywhere are mostly unstable and a good number of them also suffer from legitimacy crisis. This adds relevance of Soviet factor to Arab politics. Not only the forces opposed to regimes, even some of the conservative regimes themselves may turn to the Soviet Union for support and or sympathy. Jordan and to a lesser extent Kuwait are examples.

In this backdrop, Gorbachev's first and foremost task was to maintain, and when possible, to increase Soviet presence in and interaction with the region, so as to enable the USSR to influence future developments. His Middle East policy, as it would be seen, represent a combination of both continuity and change. Gorbachev's call for an international conference with the Soviet Union and the United States as co-chairmen to resolve the central issue of the Middle East, namely, the Arab-Israeli conflict, is a continuation of long-standing Soviet policy. It is the same three-point plan for settling the conflict, viz. (i) the total withdrawal of Israeli forces to the pre-1967 War boundaries; (ii) the right to exist of all states in the region, including Israel; (iii) and the establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza. The only change brought in by Gorbachev is the call for a preparatory committee made up of the permanent members of the UN Security Council to arrange the peace conference.<sup>137</sup>

Since 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the USSR had been excluded from the Middle East peace process. Gorbachev does not seem to be

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137. Robert O. Freedman, "Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East", in Robin F. Laird (ed.), *Soviet Foreign Policy*, (The Academy of Political Science, Vermont, 1987), p. 195.



willing to remain in the sideline of Middle East politics. As viewed by him, an international conference under Soviet-US co-chairmanship to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict would ensure an internationally acceptable role for the USSR in the Middle East politics commensurate with its status as a superpower. That is why, Gorbachev is pursuing this objective with more vigour than his predecessors and simultaneously showing the same tactical flexibility that he has in other areas. In pursuit of his central objective, he is readjusting Soviet policy in the region and bringing changes wherever necessary. More visible have been his efforts to diversify Soviet ties with the countries of the region without exception and also to reach a deal with the US.

One of Gorbachev's major concerns in the Middle East—though inherited from his predecessors—has been internal conflicts among Arab radicals. Soviet relations with Syria continued to be troubled. Asad continued to cause frustration to Kremlin through his support to Iran in the Iran-Iraq war, his close linkage with Shiite groups in Lebanon and more so by his sustained attempts to undermine Arafat's position within the PLO.

Gorbachev renewed pressure on Syria to negotiate with Arafat's Al-Fatah. His attempt to pursue Asad during latter's brief visit to Moscow on May 28, 1985, did not yield any tangible result. On June 9, 1985, a Tass release reprimanded Arab governments who "turned their backs on the Palestinians and upon the other forces threatened by Israeli expansionism".<sup>138</sup> The Soviet Union continued its efforts to mediate in the Syrian-PLO dispute. The problem was discussed during a summit meeting between Asad and Gorbachev in June 1985. The two leaders again failed to reconcile their differences over the PLO. Subsequent attempts by the Soviet Union to mediate Asad-Arafat dispute also suffered the same fate.<sup>139</sup> The

138. See, Pedro Ramet, "The Soviet-Syrian Relations", *Problems of Communism*, (September-October, 1986), p. 45.

139. See, *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46; and also, Robert O. Freedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-182.



Soviet Union only managed to remain in good terms with both sides.

One of the most severe problems faced by Gorbachev in the Middle East has been the political crisis in the Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) which erupted in January 1986. The crisis involved a power struggle between PDRY President Ali Nasser Muhammad and the man he had ousted in February 1980, Abul Fattah Ismail. Muhammad, politically weakened in the October 1985 Party Congress, evidently decided to eliminate Ismail by a preemptive strike. While Ismail was killed, the fighting between factions loyal to Ismail and Muhammad spread throughout the country which claimed the life of 4,000 Party members alone.<sup>140</sup> The Soviets were taken by surprise by the sudden outbreak of the crisis. Nonetheless, they regained control of the situation. Muhammad was finally forced into exile. With Soviet blessing, Prime Minister Hayder al-Attas assumed the Presidency.

The political crisis in the PDRY once again revealed the danger inherent in the policy of building socialism in economically and politically backward countries. During the crisis, the Soviet Union has been compelled to increase its military commitment to the PDRY and now the Soviet Union will have to increase its economic commitment to that country. The crisis slowed down Soviet efforts to improve its relations with the conservative Arab states of the Gulf. While the crisis is resolved the country is yet to achieve long-standing stability.

Recent Soviet relations with Libya have been an object of controversy and wide-spread speculations. Most controversial has been the Soviet decision to send SAM-5 missiles to Libya in 1985. This gesture has been widely viewed as a high degree of Soviet commitment to defend Tripoli in case of latter's conflict with the US.<sup>141</sup> Such speculations, however, proved to be incorrect. During

140. See, Robert O. Freedman *op cit.*, pp. 191-92.

141. See Harry Gelman, *The Soviet Union in the Third World : A Retrospective Overview and Prognosis*, Occasional Paper, OPS-006 (RAND/



the US-Libyan crisis of January-April 1986, when the US conducted a series of air strikes on Libya, Soviet response was mild, and limited to diplomatic gesture. While seeking to gain some political capital out of the crisis, the USSR cautiously avoided any commitment beyond diplomatic support.<sup>142</sup>

Soviet decision to send SAM-5s and the level of its arms transfer to Libya could be better explained by economic considerations rather than political or military factors. Libya purchased some \$ 5 billion worth of weapons between 1975 and 1979, and another \$ 8 billion in 1979-80.<sup>143</sup> US official sources suggest that by 1983 Libyan arms purchase from the Soviet Union crossed the amount of \$ 20 billion.<sup>144</sup> In the backdrop of sharp decrease in Soviet hard currency earnings from the export of fuel and raw materials, Soviet arms deliveries to Libya and other clients with hard currency repayment are determined more by economic than political considerations.

It would be a misnomer to refer to Libya as an ally of the Soviet Union. The USSR has so far avoided a formal Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Libya and almost certainly would do the same in the future. Libya is a maveric in international politics. Its pattern of behaviour in international arena is so unpredictable and characterized by so many dramatic shifts and high stake gambles that does not suit to stable alliance relationship. One can certainly presume that the Soviet Union under Gorbachev would not go for any strong commitment in favour of Libya. However, Gorbachev is likely to take advantage of Libya's conflict with the US if not for anything else, for selling arms.

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UCLA Center for the Study of Soviet International Behaviour, Santa Monica, March 1986), p. 30.

142. See, Robert O. Freedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-93.

143. Francis Fukuyama, *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World*, (The Rand Corporation, R-3337-USDP, Santa Monica, February, 1986), p. 54.



In recent years, the Soviet Union has significantly increased its efforts aimed at establishing and improving relations with conservative and moderate Arab states, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula. The USSR established diplomatic relations with Oman and United Arab Emirates (UAE) in September and November 1985 respectively,<sup>145</sup>. For Oman and the UAE it was a reinsurance against possible threats from Iran and to a lesser extent from internal opposition. Contacts between the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia are increasing. Bilateral trade has increased substantially.<sup>146</sup> The Saudi Oil Minister visited Moscow in early 1987. In view of these developments, rumours persists that the establishment of Saudi-Soviet diplomatic relations is imminent.<sup>147</sup>

In recent years, under Gorbachev in particular, the Soviet Union has notably improved its relations with Kuwait. Bilateral economic relations between the two countries have been complemented by Soviet supply of arms to Kuwait. During 1981-1985, the Soviet Union provided Kuwait with 9% of its total arms procurement.<sup>148</sup> The Soviet Deputy Defence Minister Vladimir Govorov visited Kuwait on January 12-16, 1986, for talks on a possible arms deal. An economic cooperation agreement between the two countries was signed on February 11, 1986.<sup>149</sup>

Among Gulf countries, Kuwait appears to be most receptive to Soviet overtures. A number of reasons lies behind it. Kuwait is trying to carry out a policy that would satisfy as many countries and groups as possible, including those considered to constitute threat to its regime. Diversification of its trade relations and

144. Lisa Anderson, "Qadhdhafi and the Kremlin", *Problems of Communism*, (September-October 1985), p. 29.

145. *Keessing's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXXII, 1986), p. 34135.

146. Peter Shearman, *op. cit.*, p. 1096.

147. Francis Fukuyama; "Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy", *Problems of Communism*, (September-October 1987), p. 8.

148. Mark N. Kramer, Soviet Arms Transfer to the Third World", *Problems of Communism*, (September-October 1987), p. 54.

149. *Keessing's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXII, 1986), p. 34768.



source of arms procurement is designed to demonstrate a certain balance in its relations with the great powers. In this regard, Kuwait's friendly relations with the Soviet Union were aimed at neutralizing radicals in and around the country. More important, it was also designed to gain Soviet support in coping with the threat posed by Iran.

Kuwait's policy paid off. In May 1987, the Soviet Union undertook a rather dramatic initiative to protect Kuwaiti tankers threatened by Iran. It permitted Kuwait to charter three Soviet-flagged tankers to transport Kuwaiti oil through the Persian Gulf. This gesture was designed to demonstrate the usefulness of partnership with the Soviet Union, particularly to the conservative Gulf states. It also indicated Gorbachev's preparedness to play a more active role in the Gulf than his predecessors. However, Soviet involvement in the Gulf remained low-key and non-confrontational. Even when a Soviet freighter was hit by an Iranian gunboat, Moscow's response was mild.<sup>150</sup>

As seen from Moscow, from an escalation of the Iran-Iraq war the Soviet Union was to gain little but lose much of whatever influence it had in the region.<sup>151</sup> Gorbachev apparently adopted the policy of maintaining balance between the two belligerents. The Soviet Union continued to support Iraq with weapons. But, while Moscow voted in favour of UN Security Council Resolution 598 urging a ceasefire in the tanker war, it kept its bridges open to Tehran by not supporting a second resolution which called for sanctions against Iran. Iran itself as well has shown some interests in maintaining a certain level of economic cooperation and a channel of communication with the Soviet Union.

Post-Brezhnev Soviet leadership paid more attention to normalization of Soviet-Egyptian relations. Full diplomatic relations

150. See, Peter Shearman, *op. cit.*, pp. 1105-6

151. For details on Soviet approach to Iran-Iraq war, see, A.K.M. Abdus Sabur, "Soviet-Iranian Relations Since the Islamic Revolution", *BISS Journal*, (Vol. 6, No. 1, 1985), pp. 123-27.



between the two countries were restored in 1984. Since then, diplomatic interactions between the two countries have increased and trade relations are also gradually improving. On December 16, 1986, Egypt and the Soviet Union signed a protocol on trade exchange for 1987 worth \$ 850 million. Agreement was also reached between the two countries in late March 1987 to reschedule, over 25 years with six years grace, Egypt's outstanding debt of some \$ 2 billion to the Soviet Union.<sup>152</sup> It came at a time, when Egypt was at odds with its Western creditors, the US and the IMF in particular.

The overthrow of the regime of Nimeri in Sudan in April 1985, came as a positive development for the Soviet Union. Nimeri had close ties with Egypt and the US. The new regime quickly moved to distance itself from both the countries and improved relations with the USSR, Ethiopia and Libya.<sup>153</sup> While the move was mainly aimed at neutralizing external support to the Sudanese rebels, it also provided the Soviets with the opportunity to act for expanding ties with that country. However, Sudan being highly dependent on US economic and food aid, the limits to such expansion were quite close. Moreover the Soviet Union itself had shown unwillingness to undertake any commitment with regard to Sudan's economic problems.

Gorbachev has shown far more tactical flexibility towards Israel than any other Soviet leader since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. During a 1985 press conference in Paris, Gorbachev stated, "We realize that Israel has the right to exist, to its sovereignty and we understand its security concerns".<sup>154</sup> He also publicly urged Syria and the PLO to recognize the existence and "legitimate rights" of Israel.<sup>155</sup> His objectives have been two-fold : first, to obtain Israel's consent or at least to contain its resistance to Soviet participation in the Middle East peace process; second, to pacify the resistance of powerful

152. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXXII, 1987), p. 35227.

153. See, Robert O. Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

154. Zachary Irwin, "The USSR and Israel", *Problems of Communism*, (January-February 1987), p. 44.

155. *Time* (May 23, 1988), p. 44.



Jewish lobby in the United States to the improvement of Soviet-US relations. With this end in view, he has shown a more pronounced willingness to negotiate with Israel.

Under Gorbachev, diplomatic interactions between the Soviet Union and Israel have increased significantly. A number of informal and formal talks took place between the representatives of the two countries. In the course of these talks, it was confirmed that differences between the two countries on the crucial issues remained as irreconcilable as ever. At an October 1985 meeting with Sheverdnadze at the United Nations, Israeli Prime Minister Peres told him that Israel would agree to a conference on the Middle East including the Soviets if the Soviet Union would restore relations with Israel.<sup>156</sup> The Soviet Union can not afford to pay such a price. Restoration of diplomatic relations without Israeli concessions on the occupied territories and the Palestinian issue would amount to a breach of Soviet commitments to Syria, PLO and others. It would lead to a severe crisis in Soviet relations with its Arab allies. The Soviet Union has always maintained that the Soviet-Israeli diplomatic relations could be resumed only upon Israel's withdrawal from the territories it occupied in 1967.<sup>157</sup> Israel continues to reject the prospect of such an withdrawal.

Recent diplomatic interactions between the Soviet Union and Israel did not bring tangible results in bridging the differences between the two. Nonetheless, symbolic significance of the talks has been considered by both the sides as being more important than their outcomes. It motivated them to keep the channels of communication alive.

An international conference with the Soviet Union and the US as co-chairmen still remains Gorbachev's central objective in the Middle East. He continues to view it as the only possible means that would give the Soviet Union a role in the Middle East politics

156. Zachary Irwin, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

157. See, *Ibid.*, p. 36.



commensurate with its status as a super power. His flexibility towards Israel, pressure on the allies to show the same flexibility, sustained efforts to court Arab conservatives and moderates, all were designed to achieve this objective. His Middle East policy is also non-confrontational and flexible particularly as it relates to Moscow's posture with Washington. Gorbachev has also put new emphasis on cooperation and collective efforts to resolve the regional problems. Like his predecessors, Gorbachev is unwilling to challenge US military actions in the region. Moreover, he has deliberately distanced himself from terrorism, openly denouncing those terrorist acts for which the West holds Libya and Syria responsible. It is not merely coincidental that on May 7, 1987 the Soviet Union joined the International Convention Against Taking Hostages.<sup>158</sup>

His efforts to gain US acceptance of a Soviet role in the Middle East peace process *at par* with the US did not yield tangible results. Reagan Administration has expressed "strong reservations" about a Soviet role in the peace process.<sup>159</sup> The US fears that Soviet participation in the peace process would restrict its freedom of action in the region and beyond it. While commenting on recent Soviet policy towards the Third World, the Director of State Department's Policy Planning Staff Richard Solomon stated that "They are trying to engage us in collective procedures, international organizations and multilateral arrangements that will constrain our ability to act on our own." He has also characterized this approach as a Soviet version of counter-containment.<sup>160</sup>

Some US officials, however, emphasize the positive aspects of this policy. The US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Micheal Armacost stated that the Soviets are now "more attentive to the diplomatic methods of solving a problem as opposed merely to relying on blatant displays of row muscle."<sup>161</sup> Which line of thinking

158. Peter Shearman *op. cit.*, pp. 1104-5.

159. Zachari Irwin, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

160. *Time*, (May 23, 1988), p. 14.

161. *Ibid.*



would prevail depends on the development of events within the region on the one hand and overall climate in superpower relations on the other. And in all likelihood Gorbachev's effort would be to use one for influencing the other.

### **Africa**

During Khrushchev period, the importance of Africa in Soviet foreign policy grew significantly. Intransigence of erstwhile colonial powers, notably France and Portugal, coupled with the minority white rule in Southern Africa and the policy of apartheid led to sustained turmoils and armed struggle in a large number of African countries. Western powers by and large acted against the interest of the newly liberated states and national liberation movements in Africa. The wrath of newly-emerged pan-Africanism was primarily directed against the Western powers. In contrast, the Soviet Union had neither colonies nor even vested interests in Africa. As a champion of anti-colonial struggles and national liberation movements the Soviet Union soon became popular with African states. More important, in the process of national liberation movement, a significant part of anti-colonial forces were radicalized, although adherence to socialism by these forces rather represented an emotional rejection of capitalism and colonial oppression.

In this backdrop, Africa seemed to offer the best prospects for increasing Soviet presence and influence. Both Khrushchev and Brezhnev devoted considerable efforts to achieve advantages at the cost of Western powers in a 'zero-sum' game. Khrushchev sought to buy influence in Africa by anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and anti-racist rhetorics, high prestige economic projects and also through limited arms shipments. To start with, Brezhnev was more pragmatic and sought to forge durable political and economic ties with African countries for mutual advantage. By mid-1970s, however, the centre of gravity of support in Brezhnev's policy, as already indicated, shifted away from nationalist governments to



self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist regimes and movements involving substantial political, economic and military commitments.

The outcome of this policy has been mixed. More than 10 countries, making up 30 percent of the continent's territory and almost a quarter of its population opted for socialist orientation.<sup>162</sup> Six of the twelve Soviet Treaties of Friendship and Cooperation signed with Third World countries during May 1971—May 1981, were with African countries.<sup>163</sup> In most of the Western academic writings reviewed in course of writing this paper, Soviet extra-ordinary activism in Africa, particularly high degree of political, economic and military commitment to socialist oriented countries and its military involvement in some of them have been found to be held responsible for the deterioration of Soviet position in the continent. In reality, however, the Soviet Union never faced effective diplomatic opposition to its military involvement in Africa, neither even in Angola and Ethiopia. In contrast, the US faced concerted opposition from African countries to its policy towards Southern Africa. Moreover, Soviet-Cuban military presence in Angola has been viewed by most of the African countries, frontline states in particular, as a counter-balance to South Africa.

The deterioration of Soviet position in Africa has been the result of a host of reasons other than its extra-ordinary activism in the continent. Along with Soviet influence in different parts of Africa problems and costs associated with the maintenance of these positions also increased. The Soviet Union, however, was caught unprepared to face the challenge. The gap in technology and poor economic performance severely constrained its ability to give aid to African countries. The situation was dramatically worsened by the famine and drought suffered by Africa which caused millions of deaths. The most pressing need for Africa has been food and enormous economic assistance which the Soviet Union failed to

162. Anatoli Gromyko, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

163. See, Peter Shearman, *op. cit.*, p. 1099.



provide. It has already decreased the attractiveness of the Soviet Union as an ally and the appeal of its economic system.

Soviet failure in Africa has been visible at the political front too. In certain cases, the Soviet Union has been unable to handle properly the intra-African feuds, even among its allies. For instance, the Soviet Union failed to prevent the war in the Ogaden and subsequently 'lost' Somalia. More alarming, however, is the fact that a number of Soviet allies, notably, Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia, remains the target of US-supported indigenous insurgency which has aggravated the economic problems faced by them.

In the light of the above, Gorbachev has enough reasons to be concerned about the future of Soviet relations with the African countries. There is of course little he can do to change the situation radically. He can not respond favourably to Africa's need for food and economic aid. As already discussed, constrained by domestic compulsions, Gorbachev has embarked upon a policy of lessening Soviet economic and military commitments to the Third World. Africa also lacks dynamic newly industrialized countries (NICs) like, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Indonesia, that could be attractive to the Soviet Union from economic point of view. The Soviet Union, gifted with abundant mineral resources has no particular interest in Africa's mineral resources. As seen from Moscow, new investments in Africa are unlikely to bring dividends. The importance of Africa in Gorbachev's overall policy towards the Third World, thus, seems to have decreased. He has not undertaken any remarkable foreign policy initiative aimed specifically at Africa.

Nevertheless, Gorbachev is compelled to deal with a host of rather complicated problems in Africa mainly inherited from the past. We have discussed Soviet relations with Arab African countries in the previous section of the paper. Here our attention will be focussed only on non-Arab Africa.

While considering the reduction of Soviet economic and military commitments to its allies—particularly to socialist oriented states—



Gorbachev also can not create an impression that the Soviet Union was abandoning its allies. Such an impression would increase desertion in the ranks of Soviet allies and the West also could take the advantage of the situation. Faced with such a predicament, Gorbachev is making cautious efforts to consolidate already achieved gains in the continent with as less costs as possible.

Despite drought, famine, and inadequate Soviet assistance, Ethiopia sustained its commitment to socialist orientation. In 1984, the Workers Party of Ethiopia—a small, vanguard-type organization with about 30,000 members nationwide—was launched.<sup>164</sup> A good number of Party cadres are trained with assistance of the Soviet Union, East Germany, other East European countries and Cuba. Some mass organizations, with several million members and under the control of the Party are also designed to strengthen the support base of the regime.

In an attempt to restructure the Ethiopian economy and polity and also to regenerate growth in agriculture the government has embarked upon a policy of resettlement, villagization, collectivization and the expansion of state firms. Whether these measures would increase agricultural production or not remains an object of speculation.<sup>165</sup> However, these measures are likely to further increase the presence of the central authority in and its control over the rural areas. These developments are indicative of both the resolve of Ethiopian government to develop its economy and polity along the socialist line as well as sustained Soviet commitment to that country.

Southern Africa appears to rank most prominent in Soviet policy towards the non-Arab Africa. Reasons are many-fold. The region remains one of the most turbulent areas in the contemporary world and it is likely to remain the same in the century to come. By

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164. See Marina Ottaway, "Drought and Development in Ethiopia", *Current History*, ( May 1986), p. 234.

165. See, *Ibid.*, pp. 17-20



geological accident much of world's supply of valuable minerals like, diamond, gold, platinum, chromium, manganese and vanadium is found in the Soviet Union and South Africa. In Southern Africa, the Soviet Union has made substantial economic and political investments. More important, the Soviet Union and Cuba sustain varied degree of military commitment to a number of Southern African states, notably, Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Another important factor is that while South Africa's mineral resources are of paramount interest to the West, the US is seen by the black majority in the region as siding with the apartheid regime of South Africa and as promoting regional instability. Conversely, the Soviet Union is perceived by most of Black Africa to be supporting the Front Line States and South Africa's politically disenfranchised black majority. As a matter of fact, the manifest unpopularity of South Africa's regime throughout the continent and the political and economic ties of Western countries with Pretoria create strong incentives for the USSR to maintain a relatively high profile in the sub-region.

Angola remains the most important Soviet ally in Southern Africa. In January 1982, the USSR launched a ten-year \$ 2 billion economic aid programme to Angola<sup>166</sup>. Such high degree of commitment has been sustained by Brezhnev's successors. The Soviet Union and Cuba continue to account for Angola's security *vis-a-vis* South Africa and Savimbi's UNITA. In the period since Gorbachev's rise to power, the Soviet position over the conflict in and around Angola has hardened further. In this regard, the United States played a crucial role. In accordance with Reagan Doctrine, in early 1986, the US resumed covert military aid to UNITA.<sup>167</sup> American-supplied stinger surface-to-air missiles apparently made an impact on the battlefield against helicopters and

166. Kurt M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 11

167. Herbert Howe,, "United States Policy in Southern Africa", *Current History*, (May 1986), pp. 232-33.



aircrafts.<sup>168</sup> Initially, the Angolan government tried to thwart US aid to Savimbi by cautious diplomatic efforts as well as by threats to solicit additional aid from its traditional friends, the Soviet Union, Cuba and other socialist countries.<sup>169</sup> When failed, Angola further strengthened its ties with the Soviet Union. During his visit to Moscow in May 1986, Angolan President Dos Santos met Gorbachev on three separate occasions. In a published statement, Gorbachev underlined the USSR's long-standing and continuing commitment to Angola, declaring, "We are standing and will continue to stand firmly and unswervingly by our commitments to Angola. No one should have any doubts on this score."<sup>170</sup> Gorbachev's words of support have been matched by Soviet actions. From late 1986 and continuing into 1987, the USSR conducted a massive military build-up of the Cuban and Angolan forces in anticipation of intensified warfare against UNITA.<sup>171</sup> In the midst of all these developments, one thing appears to be clear : the focus of attention has been shifted from the field of negotiation to the field of battle. This ensures continuing Soviet interest and involvement in Angolan affairs.

Soviet involvement in Mozambique, another socialist oriented country in Southern Africa has never been as substantial as in Angola. Mozambique, like other countries of the region, was suffering from both, insurgency and economic hardship. The country is bogged down in a decade-long struggle against South Africa-supported National Resistance of Mozambique (MNR). MNR's destructive destabilization campaign has caused \$ 5 billion in damage and has taken 100,000 lives.<sup>172</sup> The Soviet Union has been highly

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168. Pauline M. Baker, "United States Policy in Southern Africa", *Current History*, (May 1987), p. 125.

169. John A. Marcum, "Angola : Twenty-Five Years of War", *Current History*, (May 1986), p. 230.

170. Kurt M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

171. *Ibid.*

172. Pauline M Baker, *op. cit.*, p. 196.



cautious in making commitment to Mozambique's security from internal and external military pressure as well as to its economic development which subsequently compelled President Machel to consider other alternatives to meet Mozambique's needs. Mozambique obtained Portuguese and British assistance in training its military personnels. Following an agreement between Lisbon and Maputo signed in April 1982, Portugal also stepped up its supply of military equipments.<sup>173</sup> Machel also made persistent efforts to improve Mozambique's relations with the other Western countries, including the US and also to diversify the source of economic and military assistance.

Encouraged by promises of Western assistance, in March 1984, Mozambique signed an agreement with South Africa known as Nkomati Accord. This non-aggression pact barred each country from sponsoring insurgency movements aimed at the other.<sup>174</sup> The Nkomati Accord did not end South African support for the MNR but, it has cooled Mozambique's relations with the USSR. The Accord, however, has significantly improved Mozambique's relations with the West including the US. Mozambique obtained a series of loans estimated at \$ 120 million from the World Bank and the IMF.<sup>175</sup> In 1985, the Reagan Administration launched a \$ 40 million economic aid package for Mozambique.<sup>176</sup> Despite South African complicity in Machel's death in October 1986, his successor Chissano has continued to form ties with the West along the path initiated by his predecessor.

As seen from Moscow, Western attempts to woo Mozambique pose a serious challenge to Soviet influence in that country. The USSR has continued to supply the lion's share of military assistance to Mozambique. In recent years, the Soviet Union has also

173. Kurt M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

174. Allen Isaacman, "Mozambique and the Regional Conflict in Southern Africa", *Current History*, (May 1987), p. 232.

175. *Ibid.*, p. 233

176. Kurt M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 18.



increased its economic assistance. Nevertheless, two meetings between Gorbachev and Chissano in 1986 and 1987 produced warm words but little in the way of material benefits for Mozambique.<sup>177</sup> Amidst these developments, the limits of Soviet commitment or ability to assure Mozambique's security and rescue its economy are becoming more and more discernable.

Since Gorbachev's rise to power, the Soviet Union has significantly improved its relations with Zimbabwe. Following Brezhnev's death, Soviet policy toward Nkomo-Mugabe conflict underwent a radical change. Now, the Soviet leaders are putting pressure on their old friend Joshua Nkomo to come to terms with Robert Mugabe. <sup>178</sup> Mugabe himself as well has shown a keen interest in improving Zimbabwe's relations with the Soviet Union. In December 1985, he visited the Soviet capital and negotiated a number of collaborative projects.<sup>179</sup> Gorbachev attaches great importance to the Non-aligned movement. Mugabe's position as its current Chairman thereby makes Zimbabwe a more important target for Gorbachev's diplomacy than many other states in the Third World.

Recent Soviet overtures aimed at improving relations with Zimbabwe have been greatly facilitated by the sharp deterioration in US-Zimbabwe relations. In July 1986, the US ended a \$ 20 million aid programme after a junior member of Zimbabwe's Cabinet criticised Washington's policy in Africa at an American Independence Day reception while former United States President Jimmy Carter walked out in protest.<sup>180</sup> US-Zimbabwe relations continue to sour. The Reagan Administration continues to view Zimbabwe with suspicion because of its anti-US voting record in the United Nations.<sup>181</sup> Robert

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177. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

178. Richard W. Hull, "Zimbabwe's Elusive Quest for Unity," *Current History*, (May 1986), p. 212.

179. Peter Shearman, *op. cit.*, p. 1110.

180. Pauline M. Baker, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

181. *Ibid.*, p. 226.



Mugabe in his capacity as current head of the Non-Aligned Movement continues to criticise US policy towards Southern Africa.<sup>182</sup> If these trends continue, there will be tremendous scope for the USSR to make further inroads in Zimbabwe.

While playing the old game in Southern Africa, Gorbachev has been cautious and flexible. Furthermore, he employed considerable efforts to make Soviet policy towards the region cost-effective. He has shown far more preparedness than his predecessors to accommodate with the interests of the adversaries of the Soviet Union in Southern Africa—the US and South Africa. In this regard, he has expressed a readiness, if not an eagerness, to seek negotiated settlement to various conflicts in the region or at least to reduce super power confrontation. In the past few years, Southern Africa has been discussed in a number of high level Soviet American meetings. In May 1985, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker met with the Chief of the Southern Africa Department of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vladilen Vlasev, to discuss the 'necessary prerequisites' for achieving a negotiated settlement in Angola and Namibia. Southern Africa was even discussed during the Summit meetings between Reagan and Gorbachev.<sup>183</sup>

### Latin America

Traditionally Latin America has been an area of little concern to the Soviet Union. Geographically, economically, politically and strategically the region has been viewed by the Soviet leadership as a US sphere of influence and little real attempt has been made to penetrate into the area. Cuba has been the only exception. Cuban experience, however, proved to be too expensive to be a model for extending Soviet influence in the Western hemisphere. Cuban experience, the tragic demise of Che Guevara and the defeat of a number

182. Kurt M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

183. *Ibid.*, p. 53.



of other guerrilla movements refrained the Soviet Union from promoting revolutionary movements in Latin America.

The situation, however, changed following the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua in 1979. The Soviet Union failed to see a revolutionary opportunity in Nicaragua even in early 1979 and it was Fidel Castro who took the initiative in supporting the Sandinista movement with weapons and political advice. In a series of post-mortems done by the Soviet academic experts, the mistakes of earlier Soviet policy toward Nicaragua have been frankly admitted. These admissions were frequently accompanied by expressions of support for armed struggle as an effective means of promoting revolution in this part of the Third World. A prominent Latin America expert Sergei Mikoyan asserted that as yet only the armed path has led to the victory of revolution in Latin America. And the Nicaraguan experience affirms what had been considered refuted by some after the death of Che Guevara and the defeat of a number of other guerrilla movements.<sup>184</sup> Thus, the center of gravity in Soviet approach toward the role of armed struggle shifted to the left. Subsequently, the Soviet Union in cooperation with Cuba increased its support to several leftist guerrilla movements in Central America, particularly those in El Salvador and Guatemala. Ponomarev even designated all of Central America as a place where several socialist oriented countries were emerging.<sup>185</sup> The Soviet optimism, however, was short-lived. The relative stabilization of situation in El Salvador and Guatemala, the US intervention in Grenada, the Reagan Doctrine and Nicaragua's growing problems with the *contras* led the Soviets to conclude that the prospects for revolutionary change in the region have receded.

Meanwhile, the rise of Gorbachev to the top post in the Soviet Union generated some significant changes in Soviet priorities in the

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184. Quoted in, Francis Fukuyama, *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World*, (The Rand Corporation, R-3337-USDP, Santa Monica, February 1986), p. 41.

185. Mary Desjeans and Peter Clement, "Soviet Policy Toward Central America," in Robin F. Laird (ed.), *Soviet Foreign policy*, (The Academy of Political Science, New York, 1987), p. 229.



Third World. As discussed earlier, the central theme of this change has been a shift of emphasis from socialist oriented countries to the economically and geopolitically important capitalist oriented countries to seek advantages out of growing contradictions between the West and the Third World countries. This has significantly increased the importance of Latin America in Soviet Third World policy. In the region, there is a number of large countries like, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and others, who play increasingly important role in world economy and international politics. These states have also shown a considerable degree of preparedness to cooperate with the Soviet Union for mutual benefits on non-ideological basis. Most of Soviet new initiatives in the region are particularly aimed at courting these countries. We would now review Soviet policy towards its traditional ally Cuba as well as Nicaragua and Central America, before discussing Moscow's policy towards the major capitalist oriented countries of the region.

Cuba remains the single-most important Soviet ally in the Western hemisphere. The USSR's alliance with Cuba measured in terms of magnitude of economic and military aid; the integration of economic political and military institutions; and above all, unprecedented endurance—remains one of the strongest of Soviet alliance relationship with the Third World countries. Geostrategically Cuba's importance could hardly be overestimated. It is an island in the Caribbean just ninety miles off the coast of Florida. Politically, Cuba gives the USSR the leverage and helps to expand Soviet presence in the region. Cuban armed forces have taken most of the burden of defending a number of socialist oriented regimes in Africa against US-supported insurgency. Soviet military installations in Cuba provide the opportunity to gather intelligence information on the United States.<sup>186</sup> All these are valuable assets in the Soviet Union's competition with the United States.

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186. W. Raymond Duncun "Castro and Gorbachev : Politics of Accommodation", *Problems of Communism*, (March-April, 1986), p. 46.



These gains, however, are sufficiently ballanced by the anormous costs incurred by the Soviet Union to sustain the Cuban economy. Soviet assistance remains crucial for Cuba's economic survival as well as its defense. As a matter of fact, Cuba's economy survives on the huge direct and indirect subsidies from the Soviet Union, most notably, in terms of underpriced Soviet oil and overpriced Cuban sugar. The value of Soviet aid and arms transfers to Cuba is estimated to be nearly \$ 6 billion per year.<sup>187</sup>

The huge drain on Soviet economy is not the only problem in Soviet-Cuban relations. Divergent approach of the two countries toward revolutionary movements in the Third World—in Latin America in particular—served as a recurrent source of tension in their bilateral relations. During early-Brezhnev period, while the Soviet Union advocated peaceful transformation from capitalism to socialism, Castro insisted on promoting revolutionary struggle in Latin America and supported various guerrilla movements in the regian. Strained relations between the two countries were, by and large, bridged following Brezhnev's tilt towards military means in promoting revolution in the Third World which took place in the mid-1970s.<sup>188</sup>

Post-Brezhnev period witnessed a cooling in Soviet-Cuban relations. While the Soviet Union is preoccupied with East-West relations and the already undertaken burdens in the Third World, Cuba is urging for more Soviet commitments to the radical regimes and movements. In the 27th Congress of the CPSU, Gorbachev totally ignored the Third World. In his address to the same Congress as a guest, reffering to the national libaration struggles in a wide number of Afro-Asian and Latin American countries, Castro argued that "the fruit of the blood and lives of many of the best sons of our peoples' should not be reduced in world affairs to so-called low-level conflicts". He also subtly urged Gorbachev to

187. *Newsweek*, (April 25, 1088), p. 10.

188. See, W. Raymond Duncun, *op. cit.* p. 48; and also, Francis Fukuyama *Moscow Post-Brezhnev Reassesment of the Third World*, (The Rand Cooperation, R-3337-USDP, Santa, Mouica February 1986), p. 40.



meet Soviet obligations abroad despite his preoccupation with economic reform at home.<sup>189</sup> Both the sides are trying hard to exert influence on each other. While Castro appears to have gone a long way to meet Gorbachev, the latter himself as well seems to have compromised his stance on at least one issue, commitment to the defence of Nicaragua.

Recent Soviet policy towards Central America suggests that its central objective in the region is the consolidation of the Sandinista power in Nicaragua. With this end in view, the Soviet Union has assumed a highly cautious and pragmatic approach towards the developments in and around the region. It has also carefully eschewed a high profile in Nicaragua, while gradually building a network of political, economic and military assistance ties to that country.

Initially the Soviet Union kept its direct military assistance in Nicaragua to a minimum level, nor was it too enthusiastic about economic assistance to Managua. The Soviets were apparently guided by a consideration that Moscow's activeness might evoke a strong reaction by the US. This point was reinforced by the US intervention in Grenada in 1983.

Since 1984-85, Soviet policy towards Nicaragua with regard to economic and military assistance underwent a subtle change. By that time, Nicaragua became dependent on the Soviet Union for its oil needs. Since 1984, the Soviet Union and its East European allies have delivered increasingly large amounts of military equipment. In 1986, for example, they delivered \$ 600 million in military assistance.<sup>190</sup> Despite these changes, Soviet moves in Nicaragua appear to have been modest enough not to antagonize the US directly.

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189. W. Raymond Duncun, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

190. Mary Desjeans and Peter Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 225.



Since 1985 the USSR has focused its energies on improving relations with a number of Central American states. With this end in view, the Soviets have carefully downplayed their links and assistance to the insurgents in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. During the past few years, the Soviet Union has increasingly portrayed itself as a promoter of regional peace. This new tactic was demonstrated by Soviet support for the Contadora peace process and also for the January 1987 plan of Costa Rican President Aries Sanchez. The Soviet Union has also exploited these proposals to initiate contacts with regimes with which it has no formal diplomatic relations and to establish a Soviet role in Central American affairs.<sup>191</sup>

An important indication of the growth of ties between the Soviet Union and Latin American countries is the promotion of contacts with the economically more developed and geopolitically important states of the region—Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. Recent years witnessed a dramatic upsurge in bilateral visits by Soviet officials and their counterparts in these countries. In October 1986, Shevardnadze visited Mexico. In September 1987, he made his highly publicized visit to Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. The Brazilian Foreign Minister Olave Setubal visited Moscow in December 1985 followed by his Argentine counterpart Dante Caputo in January 1986, and the Uruguayan Foreign Minister Enrique Iglesias in July 1986. Argentine President Raul Alfonsin visited Moscow in October 1986. The Mexican Foreign Minister Bernardo Sepulveda Amor was given a lavish reception in Moscow in early 1987.<sup>192</sup>

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191. See, *Ibid.*, pp. 231-32.

192. See, Yuriy Korolyv, "The USSR and Latin America : Towards Greater Understanding and Cooperation", *International Affairs*, (No. 12, 1987), p. 73; and also, Francis Fukuyama, "Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy", *Problems of Communism*, (September-October, 1987), p. 8.



During these visits a wide range of issues, including bilateral relations, problems in Central America, Third World's debt, super power relations, and others were discussed at high level meetings. Shevardnadze was received by the Presidents of these countries. At this writing Gorbachev was expected to visit the four countries cited above. It is noteworthy that these four countries were chosen by Brutents and Yakovlev as targets for Soviet diplomacy.

Mexico figures prominently in Soviet Latin America policy. Among the countries of the region it has the longest-standing ties with the Soviet Union. It plays an increasingly significant role in inter-American relations as well as in Non-Aligned Movement. It is also a potentially important trading partner.

During Sepulveda's visit to Moscow a new agreement was signed on cultural and scientific cooperation and trade between the two countries was expected to increase from \$ 18 million in 1986 to \$ 300 million during the next five years.<sup>193</sup> Soviet efforts designed to woo Mexico yielded at least limited results. In recent years, Mexico has endorsed various Soviet international positions on Central America.

During Shevardnadze's visit to Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, a number of bilateral agreements were signed between the Soviet Union and these countries envisaging increase in trade, economic as well as scientific and technological cooperation.<sup>194</sup> The magnitude of Soviet economic cooperation with these countries still remains small. However, the countries concerned are interested in improving relations and expanding economic cooperation. The future of Soviet relations with capitalist oriented countries of Latin America would depend on a number of factors, such as, the approach of these countries towards the role of super powers in the region; Soviet policy towards the revolutionary movements; the role of Cuba and Nicaragua in the region; the attractiveness of the Soviet Union as a partner in economic cooperation; and finally, the

193. Peter Shearman, *op. cit.*, p. 1112.



response of the United States to growing cooperation between the Soviet Union and Latin American countries.

## CONCLUSION

The formulation of post-Brezhnev Soviet policy towards the Third World has been a complex process which involved critical reassessment of previous doctrines and practical policy, careful assessment of the prevailing situation in the region and a keen search for finding ways to overcome the Brezhnev legacy and break new grounds. This process has been accompanied by intense debate within the policy making circles, contradictions in approaches to policy formulation and zig-zags at the implementation level. The process initiated by Andropov continued during the short tenure of Chernenko and culminated in the formulation of a new and more or less well-defined policy under Gorbachev.

It is rather early to judge the concrete outcomes of post-Brezhnev Soviet policy towards the Third World as its implementation has just begun. It is possible to observe, however, that within a short span of time Gorbachev has made a difference in Soviet relations with the Third World both in style and substance. Recent Soviet diplomatic overtures have eased, developed or improved its relations with a number of Third World countries and significantly reduced super power confrontation. The overall atmosphere is somewhat relaxed. The tide of anti-Sovietism generated by Brezhnev's heavy-handed policy has waned. A good number of countries previously hostile towards the USSR has shown keen interest in developing relations with her for mutual benefits on non-ideological basis.

Most striking success achieved by Gorbachev lies in the fact that he successfully convinced his counterparts in the Third World as well as in the West that undue reliance on military force in pursuing the targets of opportunity in the Third World was a legacy of Brezhnev era and that the new leadership under him was determined to over-



come that legacy. He also could convince them that his main objective was to promote the national interest of his country through peaceful means and mutually beneficial cooperation. While he prefers socialism he has no intention to push revolutions through military means. Instead of making efforts to gain unilateral advantages in its competition with the US for preponderance in the Third World, the Soviet Union under Gorbachev is trying to secure an internationally acceptable role for itself in world economy and international politics commensurate with its status as a super power. All these are likely to facilitate further Soviet moves in the Third World.

The moot question is no longer whether Gorbachev is sincere in his new policy, but, whether he could implement it. Answer to this would depend on a number of factors, most of which are beyond his direct control. By and large his policy is likely to be welcomed by the Third World countries. Suffering from severe economic problems, stagnation, debt crisis and unequal economic relations with the West, the Third World would very much like to see the USSR as a partner in economic cooperation with a view to decrease its dependence on and increase its bargaining capability vis-a-vis the West. No less important is the fact that a large number of Third World countries are suffering from varied degree of political instability. These countries would be interested in maintaining certain level of cooperation with the Soviet Union with a view to thwarting the disruptive effects which Moscow could otherwise have on these countries.

However, the response of Third World countries to Soviet overtures would largely be shaped depending on the perspectives of individual countries. Every country would do its own cost-benefit analysis of the improvement of relations with the Soviet Union in terms of its security interests, economic benefits as well as other foreign policy priorities.

Gorbachev has clearly overwhelmed the critics of his policy both at home and abroad. Within a very short time he has consolidated his power in the Party and the Government and



brought to the forefront cadres who are close to him both politically and personally. Geneva Accords on Afghanistan has demonstrated Gorbachev's significant command over foreign policy. By and large, the West remains favourably disposed to Gorbachev's Third World policy. Gorbachev has been successful in finding out a common language with even an anti-communist crusader like President Reagan. None of Gorbachev's predecessors could impress the Western statesmen, academia and media to the extent as he did. All these are likely to serve as valuable assets in implementing his policy.

Nonetheless, there is a strong undercurrent in the USSR as well as in the West which is skeptic and suspicious about or even hostile to Gorbachev's policy. The fall of Boris Yeltsin, occasional opposition of Igor Ligachev—the second man in the Party are indicative of the fact that the 'old guard' still has a voice in the CPSU. While Gorbachev's success would reduce their opposition or even isolate them in the Party, his failures could strengthen their call for the return to ideological orthodoxy.

In the West, particularly in the US, there is a variety of forces which could act as disruptive to Gorbachev's policy. Certain circles in the West are still suspicious about Gorbachev's sincerity and are inclined to create pressure on him to appear more flexible. Others in the West tend to consider Gorbachev more threatening to Western, particularly US positions in the Third World than his predecessors. However, potentially most disruptive to Gorbachev's Third World policy remain and would continue to remain those influential circles in the US who are tempted to take the advantage of Soviet withdrawal from some of its previous positions. Their attempts could strengthen those forces in the Soviet Union who still prefer a heavy-handed foreign policy.

Gorbachev's success in courting economically and geopolitically important countries in various Third World regions would greatly depend on the success of his domestic economic policies. In order



to be able to compete effectively with the US in the Third World, the Soviet Union needs to develop its economy and technology upto or at least close to the Western level.

So far, Gorbachev has shown a clear unwillingness to promote Third World revolutions. Indeed, there is hardly any broad-based radical revolutionary movement at present in the Third World which he could promote. Upsurge and decline in revolutionary movement in the Third World have a cyclic character. Therefore, it is logical to assume that there may be a new upsurge in revolutionary movement after some time to come. In that event, whether and how Gorbachev would reconcile his present policy with Marxist-Leninist ideology remain open questions.